NATURE'S CAROL SINGERS

RICHARD KEARTON
F. Z. S., F. R. P. S.

WITH PHOTOGRAPHS BY
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NATURE'S CAROL SINGERS

A NIGHTINGALE AND ITS MATE.

Nature's Carol Singers

By

Richard Kearton

F.Z.S., F.R.P.S.

Author of "Wild Nature's Ways," "The Adventures of Jack Rabbit," etc. etc.

Illustrated with Photographs
Direct from Nature by
Cherry and Richard Kearton

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PREFACE.

Their plumage dazzles not, but yet can sweeter strains be heard?
Let other feathers vaunt the dyes of deepest rainbow flush,
Give me old England's nightingale, its robin and its thrush.—COOK.

DESPITE the fact that we live in a small and thickly populated country, we are singularly rich in song birds, thanks to our numerous old furze-clad commons, game preserves, and a healthy sentiment in the great majority of rich and poor alike towards the wee, feathered carol-singers that make grove and hillside ring with their sweet, happy music.

This little book deals in a concise and popular manner with the appearance, haunts, habits, nests, eggs, songs, and call notes of the winged melodists that breed in various parts of the British Islands. I have endeavoured to describe them in such a way that the reader may be able to identify them for himself or herself in wood and field, and where two species bear a similarity of appearance

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or song, to emphasise the points wherein they differ.

The study of our native song birds will be found to contain many delightful curiosities, and to present not a few entertaining problems. For instance, all our first-class melodists, such as the Nightingale, Song Thrush, Blackcap Warbler, Woodlark, and Garden Warbler, are dressed in the most sober of sober colours. Male migrants generally arrive upon our shores before the females, and at once commence to sing and practise all kinds of curious antics in order to attract the attention of their prospective brides when they arrive. Individual birds of the same species vary greatly in the quality of their songs, and nearly all the members of a species sometimes sing better in one part of the country than another. Birds are first-class plagiarists, and not only copy each other's notes, but upon occasion actually improve the quality of the music they borrow. Some of them, such as the Chaffinch, practise their notes thousands of times per day, and a Song Thrush sings as many as sixteen hours out of the twenty-four.

The following questions in regard to the behaviour of some of our feathered

melodists are amongst those put to me by both young and old after my lectures, and contain a good deal of food for reflection: Why do some birds sing by night as well as by day after they have mated? Why do some birds cease to sing as soon as their young ones are hatched, and others continue practically all the year round? Why does a caged Skylark sing blithely in a dingy alley, where he has no mate to attract, no rival to challenge, nor any apparent condition of life to induce a feeling of happiness? Why does a Skylark practise its notes on the ground more during the closing than the opening part of the season? How do birds know of a coming change in the weather and sing joyously to foretell it long before man, with all his acquired experience, is aware of the fact? Why do some winged melodists, such as the Blackbird for instance, sing the best during a shower of rain? Is it in anticipation of an increased supply of food? Would a chick that had never heard the song of its own species be able to sing it when it grew up?

No answer to many of these interesting questions that are constantly cropping up will be found in any ornithological

work with which I am acquainted, and they show two things clearly to my mind, viz.: How little we really know about even our common song birds, and what a great desire there is on the part of the public to find out.

Nature is never prodigal in the giving up of her secrets, but the diligent student is sure to discover some interesting fact or solve some entertaining problem; and I would urge all young people who care for the delights of the country to take up the study of Nature's charming musicians. They will find it deeply interesting to learn to identify birds by their songs and call notes, and even to imitate the latter with sufficient skill to attract members of the species to which they belong.

Finally, I trust I may be permitted to hope that this little book will stimulate an interest in our song birds, which have always been a never-ending source of solace and delight to me.

R. KEARTON.

Caterham Valley.

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THE CUCKOO.

"Not the whole warbling grove in concert heard
When sunshine follows shower the breast can thrill
Like the first summons, Cuckoo,
of thy bill."
—*Wordsworth.*

THE soft, far reaching notes of the Cuckoo are loved by young and old alike, because they tell a tale of hope and gladness, of warm sunshine and sweet spring flowers. It has been regarded as "the darling of the year" all down the ages since the oldest known English lyric, in which it figures, was penned:

"Sumer is icumen in,
Loude sing Cuckoo."

The Cuckoo is a strange, mysterious bird whose history is not yet fully known in spite of all the careful attention it

has received at the hands of naturalists for generations.

FOSTER MOTHER TREE PIPIT STRETCHING HERSELF AFTER HAVING FED YOUNG CUCKOO.

It arrives in this country during April, and departs again in July, leaving its uncared-for young ones to follow, in August and September, to the winter quarters of the species in Africa's sunny clime.

The bird makes no attempt whatever at nest-building, but deposits its eggs singly, as a rule in those of small birds, and allows the little dupes to hatch out and rear its young. From its similarity in appearance to a small hawk the ancients believed that in the winter it changed into one. They were also firmly convinced that young Cuckoos not only swallowed all the other chicks in the nests in which they were hatched out themselves, but, as a mark of ingratitude, finally devoured their foster-parents. Although this was, of course, quite wrong, the real facts of the bird's life and career are quite as romantic, as we shall see presently.

Up to quite recently, people supposed that the female Cuckoo, when about

to lay, watched the nest of some smali bird until the owner left it in search of food, when she stealthily sat down and dropped one of her own eggs into the structure. Unfortunately for this theory, it would not hold good in the case of domed nests built by such species as the Common Wren and Willow Warbler,

YOUNG CUCKOO IN MEADOW PIPIT'S NEST. BIRD'S OWN EGGS THROWN OUT ON TO EDGE OF STRUCTURE.

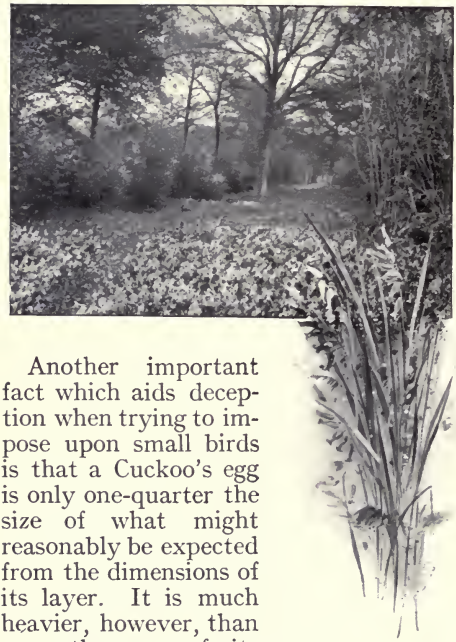
CUCKOO'S EGG IN MEADOW PIPIT'S NEST

both of which are occasionally victimised. This puzzle has been satisfactorily solved by the discovery of the real facts. The Cuckoo lays her eggs upon the ground, and, picking them up in her bill, deposits them in the homes of birds whose own productions they will to some extent match in colours.

Cuckoo's eggs vary very widely in point of coloration. They are usually reddish grey, mottled and spotted closely with darker markings of the same colour, or pale greyish-green marked with spots of a darker hue. I have met with them matching in colours those of the Meadow Pipit, Pied Wagtail, and Reed Warbler so closely that they were scarcely discernible except for their larger size, and a blue specimen has been found in the nest of a Hedge Sparrow.

Some naturalists are of opinion that a Cuckoo is able to lay an egg of any colour at will, whilst others favour the opinion that if an egg closely resembles in point of coloration those of the bird, say a Tree Pipit, in whose nest it has been placed, that young Cuckoo's grandfather and grandmother were also reared by Tree Pipits.

ADULT CUCKOO.



"COME AND HEAR THE CUCKOO SING, COME AND BREATHE THE BREATH OF SPRING."

Another important fact which aids deception when trying to impose upon small birds is that a Cuckoo's egg is only one-quarter the size of what might reasonably be expected from the dimensions of its layer. It is much heavier, however, than any other egg of its size, and has a thicker shell.

Competent naturalists have asserted that

the Cuckoo lays as many as five eggs during a season, and although only one specimen as a rule is found in the nest of an intended foster-parent, as many as three may be met with, but whether deposited by the same individual or not, it is, of course, impossible to say. Hedge Sparrows and Robins are the greatest victims, but even the Jay, Wood Pigeon, and Carrion Crow have been successfully imposed upon.

With a view to finding out whether the deceptive path of the bird that "tells its name to all the hills around" is a smooth one or not, some years ago I had four wooden eggs made and painted to resemble those of the Song Thrush. I tried my counterfeits upon several different species, such as Starlings, Song Thrushes, and Grasshopper Warblers, and deceived them straight

YOUNG CUCKOO WAITING FOR ITS FOSTER-MOTHER WITH FOOD

away without the slightest trouble, but when I attempted to impose upon a Ringed Plover, whose eggs I found in a little declivity on a shingly beach, she detected the fraud at once, and tapping my dummy eggs with her bill, turned round and walked away in disgust.

In order to prove how easily some birds are duped, I may mention that two lady friends of mine have, for the last three or four seasons, taken a clutch of Starling's eggs out of a hole in a stable wall, and replaced them by one common fowl's egg, and that on each occasion the foster-mother has successfully hatched out a chick.

The young Cuckoo arrives into the world without a scrap of down or the sign of a feather on its dusky, ugly little body. Very soon after it is hatched it begins to show signs of great restlessness and energy, endeavouring to throw out whatever else there may be in the nest in the shape of eggs or young. Nature has equipped the little monster well for its murderous task, by providing a hollow between its broad shoulders for the reception of its victims. It makes great efforts to

A STORY IN THREE CHAPTERS
A YOUNG CUCKOO AND HIS
TREE PIPIT FOSTER-MOTHER.

get beneath whatever else is in the nest in which it has been hatched, and when it gets an egg or chick upon its back, with raised wings, head depressed, and a foot firmly planted on either side of the nest, it rears its burden and casts it out.

FOSTER-MOTHER TREE PIPIT COMING WITH FOOD FOR YOUNG CUCKOO.

This wonderful performance was first observed by the great Dr. Jenner of vaccination fame, and afterwards confirmed by the observations and wonderfully accurate pictures made by my friend Mrs. Blackburn. Curiously enough, her daughter, Miss Blackburn, found the Meadow Pipit's nest from which her mother saw the rightful owners ejected by the young Cuckoo and also the nest belonging to the same species figured on page 3 of this work.

Sometimes two young Cuckoos are hatched out in the same nest, and then a great struggle takes place between them for possession.

Very odd things occasionally occur in regard to Cuckoo's eggs. I have found

one, perfectly fresh, covered over with moss and down inside a Hedge Sparrow's nest wherein the bird had laid none of her own. I have known one lie untouched outside a Meadow Pipit's nest, but whether left there by the layer or cast forth by the owner of the structure it is impossible to say.

A short time ago a friend of mine found a Sedge Warbler's nest near Gloucester with four eggs in it. The following day when we returned to the place the nest contained only three and a Cuckoo's egg. As I wanted a photograph of a member of the species for the present work, I parted the thick sedge grass and, erecting my camera within a few feet, got everything ready and went into hiding beneath my apparatus. In

TREE PIPIT ABOUT TO ALIGHT ON YOUNG CUCKOO'S BACK WITH FOOD. PHOTOGRAPHED IN $\frac{1}{800}$ OF A SECOND

less than two minutes she returned and, gazing into her home, suddenly grew greatly agitated and began to hammer the Cuckoo's egg unmercifully with her bill. Fearing that she might break it before I secured a photograph, I jumped up and drove her away, at the same time calling my companion over to take care of the object of her resentment. Directly it was gone she assumed all her native gentleness of manner and sat down upon her own eggs quite happy.

Although young Cuckoos show so much sagacity in getting rid of any other occupants of the nest in which they have been hatched, they sometimes exhibit great stupidity in other directions. For instance, the young bird shown with his Tree Pipit foster-mother in the illustrations figuring in this chapter did not understand the alarm cry of the little brown bird at all. It did not matter however loudly she cried "danger" outside the nest up to a certain stage in his career, if he heard anything moving he shot up his head and opened his mouth very widely in request of food. Then, again, if a newly fledged Cuckoo happens to be resting on level

MORE, PLEASE!

TREE PIPIT FEEDING YOUNG CUCKOO WHILST STANDING ON HIS SHOULDERS.

ground and his foster-mother, say a Robin, Hedge Sparrow or Pied Wagtail, comes along with a supply of food, he has not the sense to accommodate himself to the stature of his wee parent, for, instead of lowering his great dappled head, he rears it as high in the air as he can, and the feeder has to stand on his shoulders, as shown in the accompanying photograph, and literally drop the food down his throat.

The food of adult Cuckoos is insectivorous, and consists largely of hairy caterpillars such as those of the Drinker Moth.

The Cuckoo sings upon the wing, and sometimes keeps up its vocal efforts all night long. It has been asserted

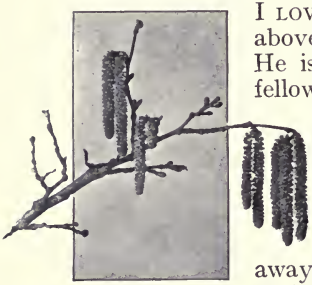
that only the male cries "Cuckoo," but this is not the fact, as females have been shot in the act of singing.

On the Yenisei its cry is "Hoo-hoo."

Gilbert White, in his delightful "Natural History of Selborne," says that some Cuckoos sing in D, some in D sharp, and some in C, and that the two former whilst performing together make a very disagreeable duet.

The notes of the bird are easily imitated by the human voice, and in the springtime I often amuse my friends by calling individuals into their gardens.

THE ROBIN.



I LOVE Robin Redbreast above all other birds. He is a bold, handsome fellow, and one of the sweetest songsters of the grove. When the Nightingale and the Blackcap have gone to their winter quarters in the far-away sunny South, and both the Thrush and the Skylark are silent, courageous Redbreast mounts to the topmost branch of some sodden, leafless tree and defiantly pours out his sweet, silvery notes.

Poets of all ages have noticed this peculiar characteristic, and one of them has expressed it very happily in the following lines :

"Each woodland pipe is mute
Save when the Redbreast mourns the falling leafs ;
Now plaintively, in interrupted trills,
He sings the dirge of the departing year."

There can be no doubt that the conditions under which the bird sings help to rivet our attention upon its performance, just in the same way that the Nightingale gains some of its popularity by singing at night time when other

ROBIN'S NEST.

woodland vocalists are silent, and the Skylark by soaring away up in the blue vault of heaven whilst pouring out its far-sounding music.

Cock Robin has received a great deal of poetic attention, and it is amusing to note how differently the bards have expressed themselves in regard to this familiar bird "that swells its little breast so full of song." Some of them say it warbles, others it whistles, tootles, carols, chirps, sings, sobs, mourns, and so on.

Any boy or girl who has wandered through the woods in winter will at once recognise the truth and beauty of the following lines from Cowper's "Winter's Walk at Noon":

"No noise is here, or none that hinders thought;
The Redbreast warbles still, but is content
With slender notes and more than half suppressed;
Pleased with his solitude, and flitting light
From spray to spray where'er he rests, he shakes
From many a twig the pendent drops of ice,
That tinkle in the wither'd leaves below.
Stillness accompanied with sounds so soft
Charms more than silence."

Numbers of beautiful legends have been woven round the bird. For instance, its ruddy breast is supposed to be worn in memory of the day when Jesus was led forth from Jerusalem to be crucified, and the wee bird perched upon

COCK ROBIN BRINGING FOOD FOR HIS CHICKS.

the Cross and "tried with all its little might to diminish the anguish of the crown of thorns."

It was an old and popular belief that Robins covered over the bodies of dead men with leaves, hence John Webster's ballad:

> "Call for the Robin Redbreast and the Wren,*
> Since o'er shady groves they hover,
> And with leaves and flowers do cover
> The friendless bodies of unburied men";

and the well-known one, "Babes in the Wood."

Although Cock Robin is at all times a bold bird in defence of his rights, and at some seasons liable to be considered quarrelsome and spiteful, he undoubtedly has his good points. For instance, one has been known lovingly and diligently to feed his mate after she had sustained some injury to her bill which rendered her unable to peck for herself, and I have myself watched and even photographed a Redbreast in the charitable

* During the middle ages it was a generally accepted belief that Jenny Wren was Cock Robin's mate, and curiously enough, many people still think that Wrens are female Robins. Of course such is not at all the case, as the birds belong to widely different species.

act of feeding a family of young Thrushes in the nest whilst their mother was away searching for very difficult-to-find food during a cold, dry spring morning.

Male Robins differ from the females only in the facts that they are slightly

YOUNG ROBIN IN ITS FIRST COAT OF FEATHERS.

larger and have rather brighter orange-red breasts. These differences, however, are so very trifling that it is by no means easy for even the practised eye to notice them.

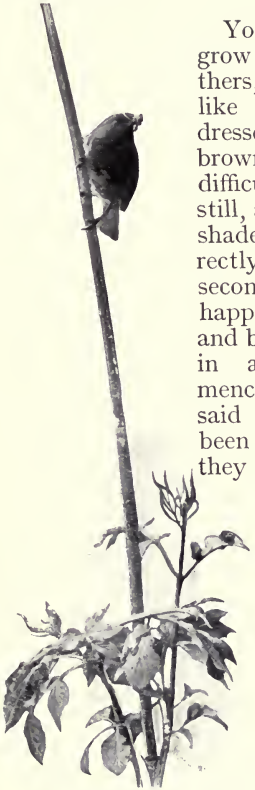
Robins commence to breed in March, and make their nests of bits of dead grass, leaves, and moss, with an inner lining of hair. At the beginning of the season building operations are con-

ducted in quite a leisurely way, occupying as much as a fortnight, but later on no time is lost, and nests are made in a much shorter period.

Last spring I watched a female, quite unaided by her mate, who was singing very loudly morning, noon, and night in my garden, build a nest in three days. One morning she carried dead leaves and moss to her home five times in five minutes!

Although generally selecting holes in banks and walls where a brick or a stone has fallen out, this species is famed for its apparent love of odd situations in which to breed. I have found Robins' nests in old tin cans, tea-pots, coffee-pots, kettles, jam-jars, biscuit boxes, cocoa-nut husks, fragments of bottles, and clock cases, and have seen them in book-cases and other places inside the much-used rooms of dwelling-houses.

Robins lay five or six eggs, as a rule, although as many as seven, and even eight, are occasionally found in one nest. They are white or light grey, blotched and freckled with dull light red. Sometimes the markings join each other nearly all over the shell, and at others they are collected round the larger end.



FEMALE ROBIN
BRINGING FOOD TO HER YOUNG.

Young Robins, when they grow their first coats of feathers, do not have red breasts like their parents, but are dressed in varying shades of brown that render them very difficult to see when sitting still, amongst the lights and shades of a hedgerow. Directly they have donned their second coats of feathers, which happens in July and August, and become like their parents in appearance, they commence to try to sing. It is said that when they have been bred near Nightingales they borrow notes from that sweet-voiced bird, and introduce them into their own songs. I can readily believe this, because I have heard a Redbreast imitate the song of a Sedge Warbler so well that I was completely deceived until I saw the vocalist.

It is unnecessary to

describe a Robin's song, because almost everyone has an opportunity of hearing it, and seeing the bird at the same time. Its call and alarm notes, however, are frequently uttered when the creature is not visible. The former is a rapidly repeated metallic sounding *tit-tit-tit*, and the latter a plaintive, long-drawn *chee*, generally uttered when some intruder is near the nest.

The species feeds principally upon insects, and is especially fond of spiders, which are sought for in the cracks of old walls, mossy banks, and on the bark of trees. All boys and girls who have read "Pilgrim's Progress" will remember how Mercy wondered and Christiana was disappointed to learn that Robins fed upon spiders instead of breadcrumbs, and the lesson Interpreter drew from it.

Robins differ individually in character almost as much as human beings. I have been vigorously attacked by a courageous mother bird of this species because I dared to look at her young ones in the nest. On the other hand, some individuals are quite timid and shy, and will quickly put a safe distance between themselves and the most harmless intruder.

Occasionally one meets with a Red-

breast living a bachelor or old maid existence at some secluded farmhouse high up amongst the hills or on some lonely, treeless island round our coast.

I have a male member of the species in my garden that always superintends my digging operations, and varies his search for upturned grubs by standing on a clod within a few inches of my spade and singing me the sweetest of little songs. May he long live to do so!

THE BLACKBIRD.

WHO does not know and love the Blackbird with his sable coat, orange bill, and peculiar habit of erecting his tail when he alights? In the North of England the bird still enjoys its old name of Ouzel, and in Scotland it is called a Merle.

The hen differs somewhat in her appearance from the cock in being of a dark, rusty-brown colour instead of "so black of hue," as Shakespeare has it of her mate.

This species is common in gardens, orchards, shrubberies, hedgerows, and woods all over the British Islands. I have even met with it breeding in a little garden close to the Atlantic in the

outermost island of the Hebridean group and within sight of lone St. Kilda.

Its nest is placed in isolated thorn bushes, evergreens of all kinds, hedges, in trees sometimes at a considerable elevation, in holes in dry stone walls, in

BLACKBIRD'S NEST.

sheds, and even amongst grass upon the level ground. Last spring I saw two in the grass, one inside a thrashing machine,

and another joined to the nest of a Song Thrush on a wooden bar inside a cattle shed, and all of them were within a few yards of suitable hedgerows. The structure is composed of small dead twigs, roots, dry grass, and moss intermixed with clay or mud, and lined with fine, dry grass.

The eggs, numbering from four to six, are of a dull bluish-green, spotted and blotched with reddish-brown and grey. Occasionally specimens may be met with having a few hair-like lines on the larger end. The eggs vary considerably in regard to size, shape, and coloration.

Blackbirds breed from March until June, July, and even August, and have been known to rear as many as four broods in a single season. Young birds of the first brood sometimes help their parents to feed the chicks of a second family.

The glory of an Ouzel's song consists not so much in its variety and compass as in the rich, flute-like melodiousness of its tones and the easy, leisurely manner of their delivery. They are readily distinguished from the hurried, vehement, hope-inspiring notes of the Song Thrush by their mellowness, stately delivery, and touch of melancholy.

FEMALE BLACKBIRD ADMIRING
HER SINGLE GIANT CHICK

Blackbirds sing principally during the morning and evening, but as a rule do not commence quite as early or go on so late as Throstles. A warm spring shower will, however, always draw the best and sweetest music from the Merle at whatever hour of the day it may fall. This species loves to sing from a dead, bare bough, standing well above the surrounding foliage, but occasionally holds forth on the wing, and I have heard one sing habitually from a housetop in the Outer Hebrides.

Although the male Blackbird helps the female to feed their nestlings, this does not put a stop to his vocal efforts. He frequently carols a few notes near the nest directly after he has delivered his catch of worms and grubs, and this fact may, to some extent, account for the chicks commencing to sing three months after they have been hatched.

Some members of this species will sing off and on as late as the end of July, and commence again as early even as September.

The Blackbird, when heard at very close quarters, may be discerned to imitate the notes of other species, as I have discovered when lying in hiding

trying to obtain phonographic records of its song. It is said to be able to reproduce the crowing of a cock or the cackle of a laying hen, and even snatches of popular songs.

The bird's call note is a *tisserr, tack, tack,* and its well-known ringing alarm cry, *spink, spink, spink.*

THE TWITE OR MOUNTAIN LINNET.

I HAVE had many excellent opportunities of studying this wee songster whilst staying in the Outer Hebrides, where it is far more numerous than in any other part of the British Isles. In general appearance, flight, and habits it closely resembles its relative, the Common Linnet, but may be distinguished from that species by the fact that it has a longer tail and more slender form, a yellow beak, and lacks the crimson colouring on its head and breast.

The female is distinguished from the male by the fact that she is lighter-coloured, and has no crimson on her rump.

Young Twites resemble their mother in appearance.

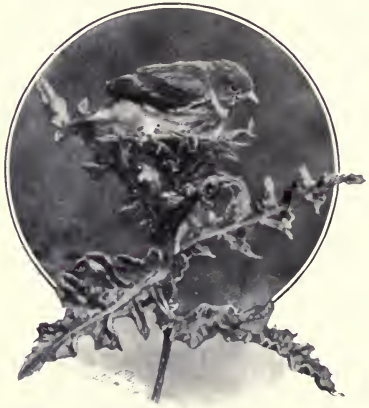
The song of the cock is a very pleasant little performance, somewhat similar to that of the Linnet, although not equal to it either in strength or sweetness. I have frequently heard the bird singing on the top of a stone wall within a few feet of his mate sitting on her nest in the honeysuckle shown in our illustration. He occasionally varied this kind of exercise by pouring forth his music whilst fluttering through the air from one side of the garden to the other.

TWITE'S NEST AND EGGS.

Numbers of male Twites roost every night during the spring amongst some stunted alder bushes growing close to the house of an old friend of mine in the Western Isles, and enliven the whole place each fine evening by a volume of twittering sound.

The call note of the species is somewhat shrill, and sounds like *twite*, from which the bird has derived its name.

It is said to breed in the North of England, but although I have met with the bird in great flocks, both in Yorkshire



YOUNG TWITE JUST FLEDGED.

and Westmorland, during the autumn, I never discovered its nest upon the Fells. I have found it breeding on several Highland mountains, but as already stated, most numerously in the Outer Hebrides. How abundant it actually is

TWITE ON NEST IN HONEYSUCKLE TIED AGAINST
A STORM-SWEPT HEBRIDEAN GARDEN WALL.

in the Western Isles may be gathered from the fact that I have found no fewer than seven nests in the course of a zig-zag walk of a mile or so from the house of one friend to that of another. As an indication of the wide variety of sites chosen by the Mountain Linnet—as the bird is sometimes called—for its little home, I will mention the places in which I discovered the above-named nests. Two were in holes in a dry stone wall, the one containing eggs, figured in our illustration, at the top of a stone wall and sheltered by a piece of overhanging turf, which had been placed there to increase the height of the fence; one in a tuft of heather growing close to a half-buried rock; one in a furze bush where a Common Linnet's nest might have been expected; another in a stunted gooseberry bush; and the last in an ivy geranium growing inside a small greenhouse, to which the birds gained entrance through a broken pane in the roof. On more than one occasion I have found a nest, containing eggs or young ones, under an overhanging tuft of grass growing from a crevice of rock on the small piece of North Uist Coast shown in the tailpiece to this article.

A Twite's nest sometimes takes a long

time to build. I remember one that occupied a whole fortnight from foundation laying to completion. It is made of fibrous roots, dead grasses, and moss, with an inner lining of feathers, fur, or hair.

The eggs number five or six, of a light bluish-green or bluish-white ground colour, marked with reddish-brown and dark brown spots and streaks

THE WOOD WREN.

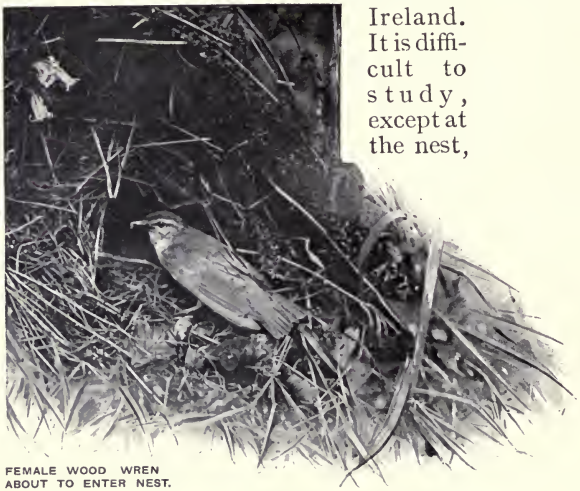
THE Wood Wren, or Wood Warbler as it is sometimes called, measures just over five inches in length. On its upper parts it is olive-green tinged with yellow, except in the case of its wings and tail, which are dusky. The chin, cheeks, throat, and breast are yellow, and under parts white. A line of bright yellow runs from the base of the bill over the eye. The bird may be distinguished from its relative, the Willow Wren, by its larger size, broader yellow band over the eye, greener upper parts, and whiter abdomen, also by its longer wings. Its nest is also a safe guide to correct identification, as will be shown presently.

The female is similar to the male in her appearance.

This species loves woods containing

WOOD WREN'S NEST
AND EGGS.

tall beech and other trees, and although of somewhat local occurrence, may be met with in nearly all suitable parts of England and Wales. It is rarer in Scotland and Ireland. It is difficult to study, except at the nest,



FEMALE WOOD WREN ABOUT TO ENTER NEST.

on account of its habit of hunting for insects amongst the leaves near the tops of trees. However, its plaintive call note and very characteristic song are constantly being uttered, and can

never be mistaken for those of any other bird.

Its nest is built on the ground amongst thick herbage, is oval in shape, and domed. The outside consists of dry grass, dead leaves, and moss, with an inner lining of fine dead grass and horse-hair. Although in general appearance the structure is almost exactly like those of the Willow Wren and Chiffchaff, it may always be distinguished with certainty from them by the absence of feathers.

The eggs, numbering five or six, are white, thickly spotted all over with dark purplish-brown and violet-grey.

The song, although short, is clear, loud, sweet, oft repeated, and sounds something like *sit-sit-sit-sit-sit-see-eeeeeze*. Each of the opening notes of the song is uttered more rapidly than that which preceded it, until they develop into a kind of trill, rising in pitch all the time, and finally end in a long, shaky, thin one. The melody is accompanied by rapid vibrations of the wings and tail, as if the loud voice shook the body of the wee singer.

The call note is a plaintive *twee* or *tway tway*, frequently used as a

kind of alternative to the song described above.

Although such a small bird, the Wood Wren is very courageous at the nest. The individual figured in our illustration repeatedly attacked my hand with bill and wings when I attempted to disturb her in her maternal duties. She was very angry with me when the photograph was secured, and incidentally it shows the great length of wing in this species.

This Warbler is a late arrival upon our shores, coming about the end of April and departing again in September. It lives entirely upon insects.

THE RING OUZEL.

MOUNTAIN solitudes, with lonely crag-strewn glens and rough, deep gulches, "far removed from the busy haunts of men," form the home of this brave, independent bird. If a few stunted rowan or whitethorn trees peep shyly from sheltered corners and crevices here and there the better will the situation be liked.

The Ring Ouzel arrives in this country in April and quits our shores again during September and October. It is about the same size as the Common Blackbird, and behaves more or less like a member of that well-known species. In colour it is dull black with an edging of dark grey to the feathers. Across the chest stretches a broad crescent-like band of

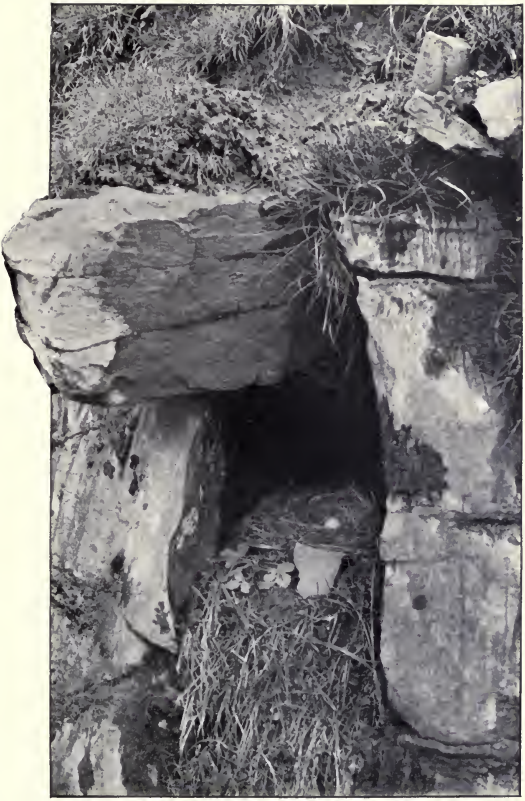
pure white. The female is rather lighter coloured, and the white gorget on her breast is neither so broad nor so pure.

This species breeds in the West of England, in the six northern counties, and in suitable parts of Wales, Scotland, and Ireland.

Its song consists of a few clear, powerful notes that would sound out of place if heard anywhere but amongst the bird's wild, lonely surroundings. During a calm spring evening the plaintive, lonesome notes of the Mountain Blackbird, as this species is sometimes called, can be heard at a great distance because the singer has a habit of delivering its music from a high boulder or cairn.

The alarm cry is a loud *tac-tac-tac*, which is uttered with great volubility and vehemence when the nest containing young ones is approached.

I have found the nest of the Ring Ouzel, which is a very similar structure to that of the Blackbird, amongst long heather growing upon a steep bank by a burn-side, amongst rocks in the face of small broken cliffs, under sheltering stones projecting from the ground, on steep hillsides, and in holes in old stone walls. I once discovered one amongst



RING OUZEL'S NEST.

rushes on flat ground, but this is an exceptional kind of situation.

Although a comparatively shy, wary bird under ordinary circumstances, the

FEMALE RING OUZEL COVERING YOUNG IN NEST DURING A SHOWER OF RAIN.

Ring Ouzel is possessed of great courage, which it rarely fails to display in the defence of its young. I have on more than one occasion watched members of

the species driving stray Kestrels away from the neighbourhood of their nests. They will fly close round the head of a human intruder, uttering discordant cries if their chicks are molested.

The eggs are very similar to those of the Common Blackbird, bluish-green in ground colour, marked with reddish-brown spots. The markings are, as a rule, however, larger than those on the eggs of the above-mentioned species.

Young Ring Ouzels have no white collar or gorget on the breast. Their feathers are brownish-black, edged with dirty white, and when they sit still on a grey limestone or under a ledge they are, in consequence, difficult to see.

THE TREE PIPIT.

We have three Pipits breeding in the British Islands—viz. the Meadow, Rock, and Tree, which are all very well named according to their respective habits. Owing, however, to their similarity of general appearance, the two latter species are frequently mistaken for the first, and described as Titlarks.

The plumage of the Tree Pipit is sandy brown in colour, streaked with dark brown above, light buff with streaky dark brown spots on breast, and dull white on the under parts. It is rather larger than the Meadow Pipit, its colours are brighter, and it has a curved hind claw which is shorter than the toe from which it springs, whereas in the case of its relative the Meadow Pipit the hind claw is long and nearly straight. This shows a

TREE PIPIT'S NEST AND EGGS.

wonderful provision of Nature. The first-named bird is wholly migratory, and perches on trees, hence the short curved claw must render it very useful for grasping branches; the second is only partially migratory, great numbers staying in this country throughout the year, and its long hind claw must prove very advantageous as a snowshoe during the winter.

As its name implies, the species under notice frequents parts of the country where trees grow, preferably in clumps with grassy glades between.

The male Tree Pipit is a very sweet singer, and makes his music more attractive by the manner in which he delivers it. He alights generally on the topmost branch of some favourite tree, from which elevation he mounts the air to varying heights of from twenty to sixty or seventy feet by a series of rapid wing beats, commences to utter his song with a *chee, chee, chee, chee,* when he has reached a sufficient altitude for his purpose, and delivers it whilst he is gliding down slowly in a kind of half-circle through the air with outstretched wings, expanded tail, and dangling legs.

When in full song this bird is a most energetic vocalist. I timed one upon

my watch last spring, and found that on an average he sang five times per minute, and three times out of the five the music was delivered upon his favourite perch. The perching song only lasted two or three seconds, as a rule, whereas the flying one took from five to seven seconds —according to the height from which the bird started—to get through.

FEMALE TREE PIPIT ABOUT TO ENTER NEST.

The song of this species has been likened to that of the Canary, and in some respects it does undoubtedly resemble it. It commences with the lark-like notes already mentioned, and ends with a ringing *tsee, tsee, tsee,* or *whee, whee, whee.*

Tree Pipits vary greatly in the quality of their music. One of the very finest singers I ever heard was on a hillside near to Builth Wells, in Wales. The call note is a *trit, trit,* or *t'sip, t'sip.*

It has been said that the male birds of

this species are seldom found living within hearing distance of each other during the breeding season.

The nest is built on the ground, and is generally sheltered by a tuft of herbage growing on a grassy bank. It is composed of rootlets and moss with an inner lining of fine grass and hair. The eggs number from four to six, of very variable coloration. Some are dull white, so closely mottled and spotted with dark brown as to almost hide the ground colour, whilst others have the greyish-white ground colour tinged with purple, and are spotted and clouded with purple-brown and purple-red.

The Tree Pipit arrives upon our shores in April and leaves again in September and October.

THE WOODLARK.

THE Woodlark is not nearly so common or widely distributed as the Skylark, and is frequently thought to be heard and seen when the bird under observation is really only a Tree Pipit.

It is smaller than the Skylark, and has a much shorter tail and more conspicuous crest. Although of somewhat similar coloration, it has a distinct light yellowish streak running over each eye and meeting at the back of the head; the breast spots are more distinct; and its flight always appears to me to be more undulatory.

The Woodlark is a shy creature, but had it not been for the very wet and benumbingly cold weather prevailing at the

time I figured the young one shown in our illustration on page 56—which could fly quite well—I feel sure that I could have photographed one or both of the parent birds feeding it.

This species is considered by many people to come next to the Nightingale as one of Nature's Carol Singers. Its voice is certainly sweeter in tone, though it lacks both the power and variety of that of the Common Skylark. Yarrell says that "its soothing notes never sound more sweetly than while the performer is mounting in the air by wide circles, or, having attained the summit of its lofty flight, is hanging almost stationary overhead."

That is exactly how the bird's delightfully flute-like notes affect me, although many people find an element of sadness in them. Burns, for instance, considered the Woodlark's song a mixture of love and sorrow, and exclaimed :

> "For pity's sake, sweet bird, nae mair
> Or my poor heart is broken."

It sings whilst perched upon a tree, and sometimes its clear, tender notes may be heard ringing out during a fine summer's night.

WOODLARK'S NEST AND EGGS.

The call notes of the species are a very musical double one, sounding something like *lu-lu* and *tweedle, weedle, weedle,* uttered on the wing.

The Woodlark, like the Tree Pipit, although roosting upon the ground, procuring its food and rearing its young there, must have some kind of timber, whether it be great belts of fir,

NEWLY FLEDGED WOODLARK.

with pastures and dry, heather-clad commons between, or bare hillsides with scattered clumps of oak and bushes here and there to make its home amongst.

It is said to breed most numerously in the southern counties of England, occasionally in the north, and rarely in Scotland and Ireland.

Its nest is very similar to that of the Common Skylark, but as a rule shows a little better workmanship, perhaps, in its construction. It is situated under a tuft of grass, in heather, or at the foot of a bush. Sometimes it is simply placed in a little hollow on ground which does not grow sufficient grass to form any kind of shelter or hiding.

The eggs, numbering four or five, are reddish-white, light brownish-yellow, or greenish-white in ground colour, thickly spotted and speckled with dull reddish-brown and underlying markings of grey.

This species commences to breed in March and rears two broods during the season. It resides with us all the year, but is subject to local movement.

THE COMMON WREN.

EVERYBODY knows and loves the wee brown Wren with its active, pert ways and cheerful rattling song, which is heard nearly the whole of the year round. "Jenny" or "Kitty" Wren, as the bird is often called, is to be met with almost everywhere by sea-shore and riverside, in the cultivated garden and on the barren waste, along the plain and on the mountain side, in thick woods and treeless deserts where there is little else than rocks for it to alight upon. Whether the sun be shining, flowers blooming, and food plentiful, or the ground be wreathed in a thick blanket of snow and the world a picture of desolation and a place of hunger, the little

bird is ever cheerful, active, and gay. As the poets have it :

> "When icicles hang dripping from the roof
> Pipes his perennial lay."

Its song is surprisingly loud and clear for such a tiny musician, especially when heard only a few inches away, as I have heard it on several occasions whilst crouching inside some of my hiding contrivances waiting to secure a photograph of some shy bird or beast. It is delivered both upon the wing and when the musician is at rest upon a branch or stone.

A Wren's call notes sound something like *tit*, *tit-it*, *tit-it-it*, *tit-it-it-it*, uttered so quickly as to resemble the winding-up of a clock.

Even in the depths of the very severest winter weather, "Jenny" Wren refuses to be "pauperised" like the Robin, the Blackbird, and the Song Thrush, and disdaining the help of man, hunts all day long for its own support in a spirit of hopeful independence. It does not matter whether it is an old moss-grown stone wall, a stack of loose firewood, or a shrubbery, in and out goes the little nut-brown bird from cold grey morn till glooming eve, examining every crack

WREN'S NEST AMONGST IVY GROWING ON THE TRUNK OF A TREE.

and cranny for some lurking morsel of insect life.

It is strange how such an innocent and altogether praiseworthy little bird should have come to occupy such an unenviable position in bird folklore. The common names of this species in most European languages assign kingly dignity to it, and it obtained kingship of all the birds by a mean kind of trick. A parliament of birds agreed that the one that could fly highest

should be king. The Eagle easily mounted to the greatest height, but when he had reached it a little brown Wren that had cunningly hidden itself on his back fluttered a little higher, and by this piece of deceit gained the much-coveted honour. Whether for this or some other equally supposed evil deed, the poor bird used to be hunted in our country every Christmas Day by boys and men armed with sticks, and its body publicly exhibited the following day whilst money was begged to bury it.

Although the Common Wren is double brooded and rears from four to eight chicks twice each season, the stock never seems to increase much from one year to another. Nobody knows clearly what becomes of all the birds. Of course, natural death must claim a certain number of victims, and I have no doubt that both Owls and rats secure many individuals whilst they are asleep in holes in the thatches of ricks. I have also found several frozen to death during very severe weather in the winter. In order to avoid this last calamity the birds resort to a very ingenious method of roosting. Although they never go in flocks by day, eight or

WREN ABOUT TO ENTER NEST
WITH FOOD FOR CHICKS

nine members of the species will congregate together in one hole at night, and by a combination of their natural warmth sleep in snug safety.

A Wren's nest is very large for the size of the builder, is oval in shape, has a domed top, and a small entrance-hole in front. The bird is famous for the number of nests it builds and never occupies with either eggs or young. These structures, which are not finished inside by a lining of down or feathers, are supposed to be built by the males, and are called "cocks'" nests. Nobody knows with any degree of certainty why they are built. It has been suggested to roost in during cold winter nights, but careful investigations have convinced me that there is nothing in this theory.

Boys and girls have an idea that if they thrust an inquiring finger ever so deftly into a Wren's nest the bird is sure to discover the fact and desert. Without wishing for one moment to do poor "Jenny" an ill turn by destroying this wholesome fear and encouraging investigation, the truth must be told. There is really nothing in the theory. If the structure be deserted, in all probability it is a "cock's" nest, and was

never intended to be anything else by its builder.

Wrens build in all kinds of situations —amongst ivy growing upon walls and round the trunks of trees, in the thatches and sides of ricks, in holes in walls, in banks amongst rocks, in hedges, amongst the rafters of barns, and even in coils of old rope and disused garments hanging up in sheds.

When the nest is built in a mossy bank the outside is generally made of moss; when in the front of a hayrick it is made of straws; and when amongst a few slender twigs sprouting from the place where some large bough has been sawn from the trunk of a tree, of dead leaves. These studied attempts, for such they would seem, at concealment do not, however, always hold good, for I have occasionally found one made of moss in the side of a hayrick.

"Jenny" Wren is a very industrious builder. One day I was resting inside an old tumble-down summer-house built into a steep hillside in a Surrey park, when, to my consternation, I saw a big black feather coming straight as a partridge towards me. There was not a breath of wind blowing at the time, and

the whole thing struck me as being most uncanny. Presently it stopped in a little bush, and I saw a wee brown wren behind it. The mystery was at once explained. I sat perfectly still, and in a few moments she brought the erstwhile awesome feather into the summer-house, and after considerable difficulty managed to get the awkward piece of furniture through her tiny front door. She brought along another and another with surprising speed, and before many days passed she had laid six white eggs which were spotted with brownish-red.

THE GRASSHOPPER WARBLER.

THE Grasshopper Warbler is a little brown bird of about the same size and general appearance as the familiar Hedge Sparrow, but with the strangest voice and manners. It arrives in this country about the middle of April, and takes its departure again in September.

It does not appear to matter much whether the country where this species breeds be wet or dry, so long as there is plenty of dense cover in which it can hide and skulk about mouse-like and unseen. It is a great lover of old haunts, and in the absence of accidents will return season after season with the utmost regularity to some favourite clump of gorse growing on a sandy common or to an ancient reed-bed in the middle of a water-logged marsh. It is very

vigilant, shy, and timid, and the slightest disturbance sends it instantly into hiding amongst the thickest vegetation it can find.

Upon his arrival in the spring the male bird commences his queer, shrill song, which sounds something like that of a grasshopper, hence the popular name given to the species.

Whilst living in a house-boat on the Norfolk Broads, studying Nature, I have had many excellent opportunities of observing the habits of this interesting bird, and have often heard it singing at night when the stars were reflected on the dark, still water around me and not a breath of wind stirred the balmy air. The best time of all, however, to hear a Grasshopper Warbler in full song is at sunrise. When the first gleam of rosy light tints the dead brown reeds with coppery red and dewdrops twinkle on every blade of grass, the bird mounts to the topmost twig of some stunted alder bush or blade of sedge, and standing quite still, with widely opened mouth and quivering body, pours forth his strange song in one incessant stream. Whilst the music lasts the head is turned from side to side, and it is this action

GRASSHOPPER WARBLER ON NEST.

which appears to give it a ventriloquial effect.

If the bird be disturbed it instantly ceases to sing, and dropping stealthily into the undergrowth waits in silence until the danger has passed; then it recommences.

When the singer is not seen, the exact locality from which the sounds are proceeding is very difficult to discover. This arises from two facts—the shrillness of the tones, as in the case of a mouse squeaking when running about amongst grass, and the movements of the head already mentioned.

The sound, although somewhat similar to that made by a grasshopper, is much more sustained, and always appears to me far more machine-like. In fact, it is known in some parts of the country as the "Reeler," in recognition of the fact that its notes resemble the sounds made by a reel used during the last century by hand-spinners of wool. Once the bird has been heard, its song can never be forgotten or mistaken for that of any other British Bird. Its call note is a sharp *tic, tic.*

The Grasshopper Warbler builds upon the ground, or very near to it. Its nest

is well hidden, and is composed of dead grass and bits of moss, with an inner lining of fine, fibrous grass.

The eggs, numbering from four to seven, are of a pale rosy-white ground colour, very thickly spotted and speckled, especially at the larger end, with reddish-brown.

The bird approaches and leaves its nest in the most mouse-like manner. I have frequently taken it for one running through the rough matted grass, even when I knew the exact whereabouts of its home which I was approaching.

THE SKYLARK.

It seems almost superfluous to give a word of description concerning this well-known and almost universally distributed song bird. The upper parts of the Lavrock, as it is sometimes called, are of varying shades of brown, the darkest being in the centres of the feathers, and the lightest on their edges. The under parts are pale straw colour, tinged in parts with brown and spotted on the breast with a dark hue of that colour. It is about seven inches in length, and, as most of my readers will have noticed, has a greatly elongated hind claw. This interesting provision of Nature acts the useful part of a snow-shoe during severe weather in the winter.

Although it leaves its higher breeding

grounds in the autumn this species stays with us all the year round, and has its numbers greatly increased by migrants arriving from the Continent.

The Skylark breeds in cultivated and uncultivated districts alike throughout

SKYLARK'S NEST AND EGGS.

the country. I have found its nest within a few yards of the open Atlantic and at an elevation of nearly two thousand feet above sea-level.

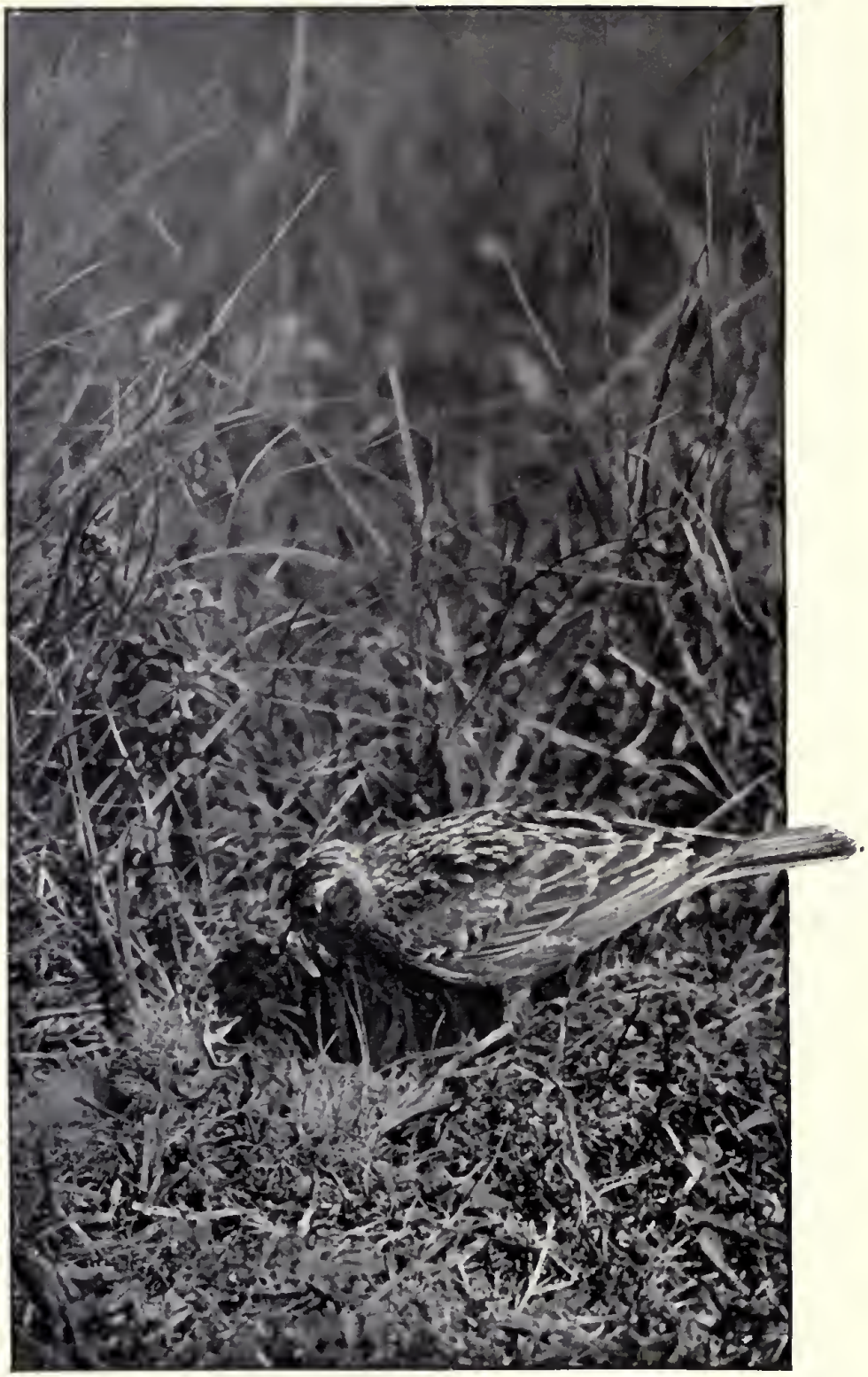
The nest is placed on the ground in a

slight hollow scratched out by the bird under tufts of grass, ling, heath, in corn, and amongst the sun-baked clods of fallow fields. It is made of grass rootlets and horsehair—frequently nothing but the first-named, used sparingly with the slenderest blades forming the inner lining. I have found larks' eggs from April until the end of July. They number four or five, of a dirty white ground colour, occasionally tinged with olive-green, thickly speckled and spotted with olive-brown and underlying markings of brownish-grey.

The sprightly song of the Skylark is probably better known and remembered by most people than even the appearance of the familiar little brown bird itself. Poets of all ages have praised it in their verse, but nobody has ever excelled Shakespeare's golden line :

"Hark ! hark ! the lark at heaven's gate sings."

In a moderate breeze the Lavrock rises almost perpendicularly, but during a calm in circles, and with rapidly beating wings pours out his loud, joyous song until he sometimes reaches an altitude of a thousand feet or more. Some people say that the bird soars until it becomes



MOTHER SKYLARK FEEDING CHICKS.

invisible, but I have never in all my life heard a Skylark when I could not see it. However, it is only right to confess that I am gifted with abnormally strong eyesight. He continues to sing upon his descent, but in a somewhat altered tone, until approaching the ground, when his carol suddenly ceases, and with closed wings he drops like a stone to the earth.

Early in the season Larks rise but a small height in the air, and sing only for a brief period; but in the full tide of their joy they pour out their music for six, seven, and even ten or fifteen minutes without ceasing. During the latter part of the season the males of this species appear to grow idle and sing a good deal upon the ground. I have also heard them sing from the tops of gates, small bushes, and even stunted trees.

I fondly imagined that everybody loved the varied, sprightly, and unstinted song of the Skylark until the other day, when I happened to dip into an old book on the subject of our song birds, and discovered that the author described its notes as "harsh and monotonous in the extreme . . . . and when divested of all associations they are a wretched concern . . . wholly devoid of melody."

I thought that the writer was preparing to justify himself for eating larks, but this practice he appeared to decry almost as much as the bird's music.

Skylarks frequently borrow notes from other birds. In the Outer Hebrides great numbers of them introduce the sweet call notes of the Ringed Plover into their carols. Unless some enemy in the shape of a Merlin appears in the sky they always, or nearly always, end their songs with a note sounding like *hear-it, hear-it, hear-it.* The call sounds like *tu-wit, twe-wit,* or *two wut.*

THE REDSTART.

THE Redstart has been very aptly named, for the second syllable of the word means tail. It is also known in many parts of the country as Firetail, and the bright rusty-red colour of that appendage, which is quite unlike that of any other British bird, and is constantly being shaken and quivered, renders it easy to identify whenever and wherever it may be seen.

This bird arrives upon our shores about the second week in April, and wings its way south again towards the end of August, both movements being subject to some modification in consequence of the character of the weather prevailing at the time it commences its travels.

It is found breeding in suitable places all over England and Wales, and less numerously in Scotland. I have met

FEMALE REDSTART WITH FOOD FOR CHICKS.

with it most commonly in certain parts of the Principality and in Westmorland and Northumberland. It appears to be partial to isolated farmhouses with a few old trees round them and plenty of straggling, dilapidated outbuildings, old ruins, and gardens surrounded by moss-grown stone walls. I have frequently found the bird, however, breeding in solitary woods, and secured the photograph showing the nest and eggs figuring in this article in

the silent depths of a great Highland pine forest.

The male Redstart has a short but soft and very sweet song, much resembling that of the Pied Flycatcher. Whilst staying out all night making observations, both in South Wales and the North of England, I have heard it very late in the evening and very early in the morning. It is oft repeated, and the singer

MALE REDSTART WITH FOOD FOR YOUNG.

borrows notes from many other feathered vocalists, such as the Swallow, Blackbird, Whitethroat, and Nightingale.

The call note of this species sounds something like *wee-tit-tit.*

REDSTART'S NEST AND EGGS BENEATH A STONE ON THE GROUND. THE STONE WAS LIFTED TO SHOW NEST AND EGGS.

The nest is situated in a hole in a tree or stone wall, sometimes under a stone partly buried in the ground, where a Wheatear might be expected to make her home, as in the case of the one figured in our illustration on page 195. It is composed of dry grass, dead leaves, and rootlets, and lined with hair and feathers.

The eggs number from four to six or even eight, although personally I have never seen more than seven. They are pale bluish-green, somewhat lighter than those of the Hedge Sparrow, and said to be occasionally marked with light red spots. I have never met, however, with this spotted variety.

THE MEADOW PIPIT.

THE Meadow Pipit, or Titlark as the bird is frequently called, is much more abundant than the Tree Pipit. It is rather smaller in size, duller in colour, has more and smaller spots on the breast, and when hunting for food has a habit of making little periodical rushes after insects in a more wagtail-like manner than its relative.

This species is partial to open pastures, and bent and heather-clad moorland districts, and is very abundant on the Fells in the North of England, where I can safely say I have found hundreds of nests during the course of my life. I have met with it breeding quite commonly as low down as the Norfolk Broad district and as high up as the

most elevated mountain tops I have ever visited in the Highlands.

Its song is somewhat shrill, and not so musical as that of the Tree Pipit. It is uttered on the wing, the bird rising to a height of thirty or forty feet in order to deliver it; also often from a stone wall, stunted bush, or boulder.

The alarm note of this species when flushed sounds like *peep, peep,* and that of distress when disturbed at the nest *trit, trit.* Call note: *zeeah, zeeah.*

The nest is generally built on a bank and hidden by some overhanging tuft of herbage, or amongst heather. I have,

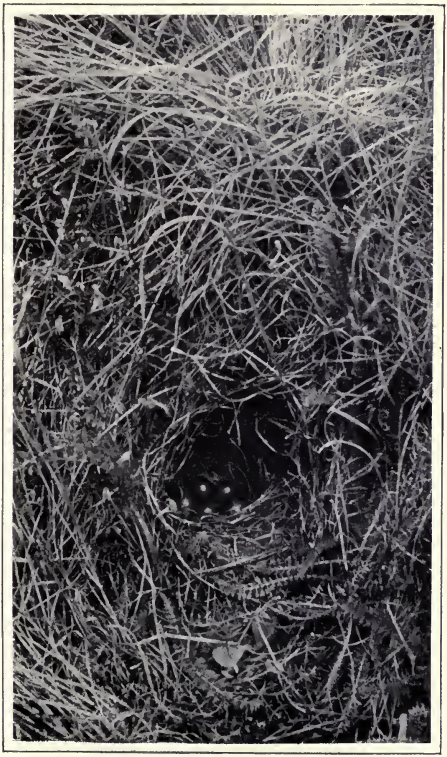
YOUNG MEADOW PIPIT PHOTOGRAPHED WHILST SHELTERING BEHIND A STONE DURING A HIGHLAND STORM.

however, found two in holes amongst rough stones where a Wheatear might have been expected to breed. The structure is composed of bents, bits of fine dead grass, and horse-hair, but the last-named article is frequently absent altogether.

ADULT MEADOW PIPIT.

The eggs number from four to six, but five is a general clutch. They are greyish-white, sometimes tinged with pale bluish-green or pinkish in ground colour, mottled with varying shades of brown and occasionally marked with hair-like lines of dusky black on the larger end. They are smaller in size than those laid by the Tree Pipit.

This species is very frequently victimised by the Cuckoo, and I have often been surprised at the lonely, treeless, and semi-barren places the "Messenger of



MEADOW PIPIT'S NEST AND EGGS.

Spring" has visited in order to find a foster-mother for her offspring.

Although such a common species, the Meadow Pipit is shyer at the nest than the Tree Pipit, and a satisfactory photograph is difficult to secure. On one occasion I was shown a nest containing chicks beneath a rock in the foreground of our tailpiece, and although I built a stone hiding-house for myself and the camera, it was a long time before I exposed a plate owing to the fact that the female persisted in standing on a crag at some distance and swallowing all the food her mate brought instead of carrying it to the young ones.

THE WILLOW WREN.

THE Willow Wren, or Willow Warbler, arrives in this country early in April, and takes its departure again in September, although individuals linger with us sometimes throughout the winter in the southern parts of England.

In colour it is olive-green on its upper parts, with dullish-slate brown wings and tail; chin, throat, and breast whitish-yellow, and rest of under parts greyish-white. The pale yellow line over the eye is narrower than that worn by the Wood Wren.

This species is more numerous than either the Chiffchaff or the Wood Wren, and is generally distributed over the British Islands wherever trees or bushes grow in sufficient numbers for its requirements.

Its nest is generally situated on the

WILLOW WREN'S NEST AND EGGS.

ground amongst coarse grass and weeds entwining themselves round the slender twigs of small bushes in woods, plantations, orchards, hedge-banks, and by small alder-fringed streams. I have, however, sometimes seen it in a hole in a dry stone wall at a considerable height from the ground and on one occasion found a nest amongst some ivy growing against a stable wall in the Highlands at an eleva-

tion of something like six feet from a much-used garden path. The specimen figured in our illustration was situated in the mouth of a rabbit burrow in Aberdeenshire.

YOUNG WILLOW WRENS.

The structure is dome-shaped with a hole in front, and is composed of dead grass, moss, and occasionally a few dead leaves and fern fronds lined internally with hair and a liberal number of feathers. On one occasion I examined the lining of a Willow Wren's nest and found that it

contained feathers from seven different species of birds, and some of them had been collected by the builder at a considerable distance.

The eggs, numbering from four to eight, are white, spotted with pale rusty-red, whereas those of the Chiffchaff, with which they are most likely to be confused on account of the similarity of the nests built by the birds, are marked with dark purplish-brown.

The Willow Wren is one of the brightest and sweetest carol singers visiting our shores. Although its song is short and contains but little variety, there is a sprightliness and simplicity about it that never fails to charm. I always associate the bird's thrice-welcome notes with the babbling alder-fringed trout streams of my youth, spring sunshine, and the sweet freshness of expanding leaves.

John Burroughs, the great American ornithologist, who once came over here to study the song birds of our country, said, "The Willow Wren has a long, tender, delicious warble, not wanting in strength and volume, but eminently pure and sweet—the song of the Chaffinch refined and idealised. . . . It mounts up round and full, then runs down the

WILLOW WREN BRINGING FOOD
TO YOUNG IN NEST.

scale and expires upon the air in a gentle murmur."

Willow Wrens proclaim their presence directly they arrive in this country by commencing to sing, and continue to do so until the end of July. I have heard one, together with a Robin and a Song Thrush, carolling in my garden to-day—the 16th of August. After moulting, they commence their music again in September, so they are not long silent.

The song varies, like that of many other melodists, in different parts of the country, and is sometimes uttered on the wing. The alarm note is a plaintive *t-wheet*, with the first *t* suggested rather than sounded.

THE HEDGE SPARROW.

ALTHOUGH a soft-billed species, much more closely related to the Robin than the Sparrow, this bird has enjoyed its popular name so long that it is likely to be known by it to the end of time. It also has two or three others, such as Hedge Accentor, used almost exclusively by ornithologists, and Dunnock and Shufflewing, which are more or less local.

It is common nearly all over the country—though I have never met with it in either the Outer Hebrides or the Shetlands—inhabiting gardens, orchards, hedgerows, and woods.

Some people do not care for the song of the Hedge Sparrow, but I must admit that I am an admirer of this wee brown bird's vocal accomplishments. Its notes, although soft and lacking in variety, are sweet and always have the true ring

of joy and hope in them. They seem to herald the coming of spring.

This species has a peculiar habit of

HEDGE SPARROW'S NEST AND EGGS.

flirting or shuffling its wings, hence the very appropriate local name before mentioned. Its call note is a plaintive *peep, peep.*

The Hedge Sparrow, of course, stays with us all the year round, and in the winter hops quietly about in gardens,

HEDGE SPARROW AND YOUNG.

round fowl-houses and sinks, diligently picking up the very tiniest particles of food that other birds either do not see or consider beneath their attention. When disturbed it timidly retires beneath some bush or hedge, and waits until all is quiet, when it comes forth again with a gentleness and modesty that win it a great deal of sympathy during hard weather.

It breeds early, and hides its nest, as carefully as circumstances will permit, in evergreens and thick hedgerows. Although such a common species, it has one habit which is not often mentioned in books. When laying it frequently covers over its eggs with part of the lining of the nest before leaving them.

On one occasion I photographed a Dunnock sitting on her nest in a bramble bush, and wishing for a different view of her returned the following morning in order to secure it. When I approached the place I observed the bird sitting at home, but in endeavouring to get close to her with my apparatus I frightened her off. Pathetically enough, upon looking into the structure, I discovered that the bird had been sitting inside an absolutely empty home.

The Hedge Sparrow makes her nest of slender twigs, in limited numbers—sometimes these are not employed at all—rootlets, dead grass, and moss, with an inner lining of wool, hair, and feathers. The lining frequently consists of no other materials than moss and cowhair.

The eggs number from four to six, and are turquoise-blue in colour and unspotted.

Two, and even three, broods are reared in a season. Nests may be found as early as March and as late as the end of July.

THE GREENFINCH.

THE Greenfinch, or Green Linnet as it is called in many parts of the country, is a thick-set little bird, about six inches, of a yellowish-green colour, shaded with ash-grey above, and bright yellow, slightly tinged with ash-grey, on its under parts. The female is not quite as large as her mate, and much duller in colour.

This species is common in nearly all parts of the country where there are cultivated fields, small woods, hedgerows, and gardens. In fact, I should say that it ranks next to the Common Sparrow amongst the finches in point of numbers.

Although a somewhat selfish bird, full of threats and warlike attitudes when a favourite item of food—such as a sun-flower head full of seeds—has been discovered, it is sociable to a great extent,

even during the breeding season. I have found three or four nests within a yard or two of each other in a hedgerow, and Mr. Hudson says that two or three may sometimes be found even on the same branch.

The nest is situated in hedgerows, gorse bushes, yew, holly, ivy, and other

MALE GREENFINCH ON THE ALERT IN A GARDEN IN WINTER

evergreens, in orchards, gardens, shrubberies, and on commons, and when compared with that of the Chaffinch is a

rather large and slovenly structure formed of slender, dead twigs, rootlets, grass, and moss lined with hair, down, and feathers.

The eggs, numbering from four to six, are white, pale grey, or white tinged with blue, spotted principally round the larger end with reddish-brown and purplish-grey.

The malė Greenfinch, although not a great feathered vocalist, has some very pleasant notes, which he trills by the half-hour together. In the early part of the breeding season he sings on the wing, but later on he grows less energetic, and is content to deliver his oft-repeated lay from some favourite tree-top. Individuals differ in the quality of their notes.

In confinement the Greenfinch soon becomes very tame and docile, and is appreciated on this account, and also for its ability to imitate the notes of other species.

The call-note is a prolonged *twe-e-er*, and when the nest is visited the members of this species utter a very melancholy one sounding like *tway*.

In winter Greenfinches congregate in small flocks, and hunt for seeds in stubble

NEST AND EGGS OF GREENFINCH.

fields and farmyards. They will associate with Sparrows, Linnets, and Chaffinches, and during the winter months they come regularly to my garden to take their share of corn, sunflower seeds, and other food which is provided every morning for the consumption of all feathered friends. It is amusing to see one of these birds rolling a grain of Indian corn about between its short, stout mandibles, gradually reducing it to pieces small enough to be swallowed, and cleverly rejecting the thin husk in which it is enfolded, and allowing it to flutter to the ground.

THE DARTFORD WARBLER.

This bird received its popular name on account of the fact that it was first observed near Dartford in Kent in 1773. It is also known by the very appropriate name of Furze Wren in some parts of the country, because it has a habit of cocking its long tail like a Common Wren and is very partial to thick growths of furze.

The Dartford Warbler is about five inches long, and in addition to its habit of cocking its tail, which measures nearly half its entire length, possesses the lark-like power of erecting the feathers on the top of its head so as to form a kind of crest. On his upper

parts the male is greyish-black, the wings and tail being blackish-brown and the outside feathers of the latter broadly tipped with grey; chin, throat, breast. and sides chestnut-brown; under parts white, excepting at the base of the tail, where they are grey. The female is browner on her upper parts and lighter underneath.

Furze-clad commons along the south coast of England form the home of this rare, shy, and interesting species, which there is every reason to fear is growing still rarer owing to the damage done to it by such severe winters as those of 1881 and 1895 and the depredations of egg collectors.

Although a very difficult bird to observe, and therefore liable to be overlooked, particularly during dull, wet weather, when it does not show itself on the tops of furze bushes, there is every reason to fear that it has quite vanished from many of its old Surrey and Sussex haunts, where I have sought for it day after day in vain. For obvious reasons I cannot divulge the whereabouts of the place where our photograph of the adult male opposite was secured, by the kind assistance of a friend who fed

DARTFORD WARBLER.

the bird on mealworms at the same place, close to his nest and young ones, morning by morning until he got into the habit of visiting the top of that particular furze bush regularly in search of his breakfast.

The nest is built in the lower parts of thick furze bushes, and is composed of small, slender branches of furze, grass stalks, bits of moss, and wool, with an inner lining of fine grass and sometimes a few hairs.

The eggs number four or five, greenish- or buffish-white in ground colour, speckled all over with dark olive-brown, and underlying markings of grey.

Although a bird of weak flight, the Furze Wren is very active and nimble when searching from bush to bush for its food, which consists of flies, moths, spiders, caterpillars, and other small deer.

It has a hurried little song, which has been described as "shrill and piping" by one authority, and "an angry, impatient ditty, for ever the same," by another. Early in the season it is delivered whilst the singer is hovering in the air like a Whitethroat, moving his head from side to side and waving his tail in all directions, but later more soberly

from the topmost branch of some furze bush. The slightest disturbance instantly silences the vocalist, and he drops straight into the hiding afforded by the thick cover below.

The most frequently heard call-note of this species sounds like *pit-it-chou* or *pitch-oo*, hence its very appropriate French name of "Pitchou." It also has another harsh note, sounding like *cha, cha.*

THE MISSEL THRUSH.

THE Missel Thrush measures something like eleven and a half inches in length, and is the largest member of its family inhabiting our islands. It is, perhaps, more numerous now than it has ever been before, owing to the long succession of mild, open winters we have enjoyed and the fact that during the last century it has greatly increased its breeding range both to the North and West. In 1800 it was unknown in Ireland, but is now abundant in that country.

On its upper parts the Missel Thrush is ash-brown in colour, and buffish-white below, marked with blackish-brown spots. It may always be distinguished from

the Song Thrush by its larger size, greyer colour, and by the fact that when on the wing it shows a conspicuous white stripe down either side of its tail.

This bird loves small woods, well-timbered parks, orchards, and tree-fringed streams common in the dales of the North of England. Its nest is built in the fork of a tree or on a strong horizontal branch at varying heights of from three to forty feet from the ground, but I have never seen it in such a bush as the Song Thrush would be likely to patronise. Sometimes it is small and well concealed, but at others it is large and quite conspicuous. Occasionally I have found it adorned on the outside with lichen matching that growing on the tree wherein it was built, and even with green ivy leaves harmonising with the moss clinging to the trunk of the tree in which it was situated; but, on the other hand, I have found nests ornamented with large pieces of wool waving in the wind, and even the large wing feathers of a white barn-door Fowl. The nest is constructed of a few slender twigs (sometimes these are quite absent), grass stems, moss, mud, and wool, with an inner lining of fine, dead grass.

The eggs, numbering four or five, vary from greyish-green to reddish-grey in ground colour, marked with brownish-red spots.

The Missel Thrush, or Storm Cock as it is called in many parts of the country,

NEWLY FLEDGED MISSEL THRUSHES.

from its habit of singing on the topmost branches of tall trees during wet, windy weather, is one of our very earliest feathered vocalists. I have heard it piping its bold, defiant notes as early as in December in the South of England

and as late as the end of June in the Highlands of Scotland, and have found its nest and eggs from the end of February until the middle of June.

Although by no means a first-class melodist, the Storm Cock has some very sweet notes, and the unpleasant climatic conditions under which he frequently delivers them seem to enhance their value. I have often listened to him, brave bird! whilst he was swaying to and fro on the topmost branch of some wind-swept tree, and I could only catch a note here and there, the rest being carried away on a chord of the storm.

Few of our poets have given the Missel Thrush any attention whatever in their verse, but one has done it justice in the following lines:

"Whilst thou! the leader of the band,
Fearless salut'st the opening year,
Nor stay'st till blow the breezes bland
That bid the tender leaves appear;
But on some towering elm or pine
Waving aloft thy dauntless wing
Thou joy'st thy love notes wild to sing."

This species sometimes imitates the notes of other birds, but not nearly to the same extent as its commoner relative, the Song Thrush, and renders them

MISSEL THRUSH AT NEST.

in such an undernote that they are difficult to hear on account of the singer not allowing the listener to approach very closely.

The call note is a harsh, rattling kind of cry, which, lengthened a little, and uttered with greater vehemence, becomes the alarm.

Although shy during the greater part of the year, this bird grows much bolder during the breeding season. I have known it build in a fruit tree within a few yards of the front door of a farmhouse, and have seen it attack a stuffed owl which had been placed near its nest, containing young ones, and knock it clean out of the tree.

THE DIPPER.

THE earliest recollections of my old moorland home in Yorkshire are of rushing mountain torrents, swirling and gurgling round limestone boulders, beneath which I used to tickle the lively little brown trout, and of white-breasted Dippers flitting up and down.

The Water Ouzel, as it is sometimes called, is not at all a sociable bird. It takes possession of some portion of a stream, often limited to a few hundred yards in length, and keeping more or less strictly to it will not allow any intruder of its own species to encroach upon its domain.

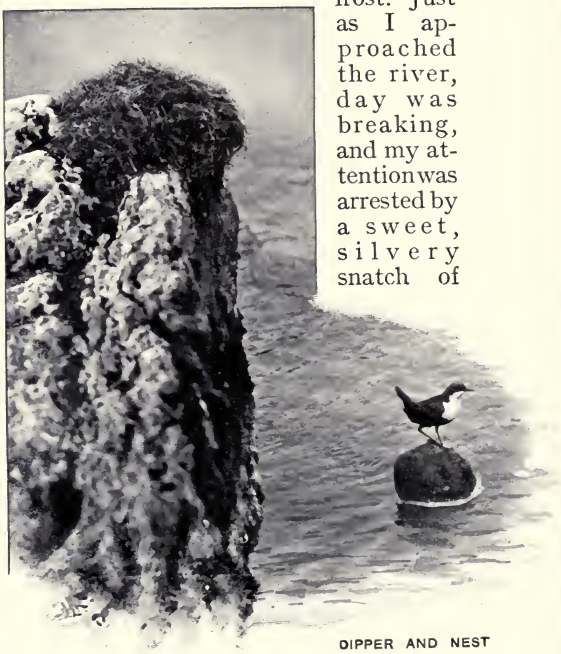
In appearance it is by no means unlike a large black Wren with a snowy-white breast and chestnut under parts.

It secures its food in the most wonderful manner when the fact is taken into consideration that the bird appears to be no more adapted to the methods it employs than a Song Thrush. Alighting on some stone in the middle of a rapid stream, it deliberately walks down into the water and swims along the bottom by a series of wing-beats, picking up and swallowing as it goes caddis worms, larvæ of flies, and small molluscs. On several occasions I have disturbed young Dippers in the nest when they were ready to fly, and have seen them one by one plunge into a deep, clear pool and progress just as if they were flying slowly and heavily along under water until they came to shore or were compelled to rise to the surface from exhaustion.

The Dipper is a sweet singer, but the listener requires to be very close to the little vocalist before he is in a position thoroughly to appreciate the bird's low, soft, warbling song, which, although of no great length, is practised even in the middle of winter.

A year or two ago I had occasion to catch an early train in Westmorland, and whilst walking through some rock-strewn pastures to the station came to an

old wooden bridge crossing the river Eden. It was close upon Christmas, the air was biting cold, and everything clad in the crystal purity of a heavy hoar frost. Just as I approached the river, day was breaking, and my attention was arrested by a sweet, silvery snatch of



DIPPER AND NEST

song, which I at once recognised as that of the Dipper. I waited on the foot-bridge until it was light enough to see the bird standing on a moss-clad boulder in the middle of a dark, glassy pool, and shall never forget the beauty of the morning light breaking on the water, the stillness of the scene amidst the lonely hills, nor the sweetness of that exquisite little carol sent out like a flood of joy on the crisp, winter air.

The call note of the species is *zit* or *chit, chit*, uttered both when the bird is on the wing and whilst curtseying and dipping in its own quaint way on some stone half submerged in a brawling stream.

The bird builds its nest in all kinds of positions, but never away from flowing water. It may be found in crevices of rock, in holes beneath stone bridges, on large moss-grown boulders in or on the bank of a stream, behind the falling waters of a cascade, and in trees overhanging rivers. It is quite a large structure for the size of the builder, and is made of moss securely woven and felted together on the outside and lined with rootlets, soft dead grass, and leaves placed layer upon layer inside. It is dome-shaped, with the entrance hole placed so low

down that the overhanging roof forms a kind of portico which cunningly prevents any stray splash of water from finding its way inside.

The eggs, numbering from four to six, are pure white, and quite unspotted.

Young Dippers, instead of having white, conspicuous breasts like their parents, have the feathers edged with dusky black, which greatly aids concealment when they are sitting at rest.

This species breeds in the North and West of England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland wherever there are tumbling, foaming brooks suitable to its habits.

A spring or two ago I spent several days inside a hollow, artificial rock, photographing the bird represented in our illustration, and was delighted with its interesting ways. The cock fed the hen, sitting inside the nest keeping their tiny chicks warm during some particularly cold weather for the season, and performed his task with great diligence and dispatch.

One day he heard the shutter of my camera click, and grew inquisitive. As soon as he had delivered his catch of larvæ, he hopped from stone to stone, until he finally stood upon one which

allowed him to take a peep inside my hiding contrivance, one corner of which projected over the bank of the beck in such a way as to allow me to look down and see the water rushing past. Cocking his knowing little head first on one side and then the other, he looked up at me and made a most critical examination of everything he saw. He apparently came to the conclusion that I was quite harmless, for when he had satisfied his curiosity he sang a little song, and then flew away in search of more food for his mate and their chicks.

THE CHIFFCHAFF.

THIS tiny warbler measures only about four and three-quarter inches in length, is dull olive-green tinged with yellow above and yellowish-white below. Over the eye it wears a pale yellowish streak which grows whiter as it recedes.

The Chiffchaff is, with the exception of the hardy Wheatear, the first feathered wanderer to return to us in the spring, and is eagerly looked, or rather listened, for by naturalists because its welcome notes stand in their calendar as January 1 does to the rest of the world—the beginning of a New Year—not of days, weeks, and months, but of awakening life, activity, and joy. It arrives in March and departs again in October, some individuals having the hardihood to stay even through the

CHIFFCHAFF AND NEST

winter in the mild south-western parts of England.

This species breeds generally throughout the southern and midland parts of

NEST AND EGGS OF CHIFFCHAFF.

England, but it is not common in the northern counties or in Scotland. It is met with in all suitable districts of Wales and Ireland, but is everywhere more or less local.

Shady woods, well-timbered dells, and stream-sides with plenty of matured trees clustering round are beloved haunts of the Chiffchaff, which builds its nest on or near the ground amongst tall grass tangled with brambles and small bushes, hedge and ditch banks, and sometimes in ivy growing against trees and walls. The structure is oval, domed, and has an entrance hole in the side. It is made of dead grass, withered leaves, and moss—sometimes a few fern fronds are employed—and is lined with hair and feathers.

The eggs, numbering from five to seven, are white, sparingly spotted with dark purplish-brown.

It is by no means an easy matter for the inexperienced ornithologist to distinguish the Chiffchaff from the Willow Wren, although the species under notice is a trifle smaller and duller in colour.

Its song, if two oft-repeated notes can be dignified by such a name, is, however, quite unique and impossible to confuse with that of any other British bird. The two notes sound something like *chiff chaff* or *chip chop*, and are uttered four or five times in succession as the bird hunts from bough to bough and tree to tree after its insect food.

To some people it is said to grow exceedingly wearisome, but to me it always sounds such a part of the pleasant things of spring that it never palls.

The call note sounds something like *tweet* or *wheet*, and the alarm cry like *whooid* or *whooit*.

THE WHITETHROAT.

The Whitethroat, or Greater Whitethroat as it is sometimes called in contradistinction to its near and rarer relative, the Lesser Whitethroat, is a very common summer visitor to our shores, arriving about the second or third week in April and taking its departure again in September and October.

It is about five and a half inches in length. The upper parts of its body are brown tinged with grey on the head and neck, and reddish elsewhere; wings dusky, the coverts being edged with reddish-buff; tail quills dull brown, the outer ones edged and tipped with white, which is prominently shown when the bird is flying away from the observer. The chin and throat are white, account-

ing for the aptitude of the bird's popular name ; breast and under parts pale grey, tinged with a beautiful rosy flesh-colour.

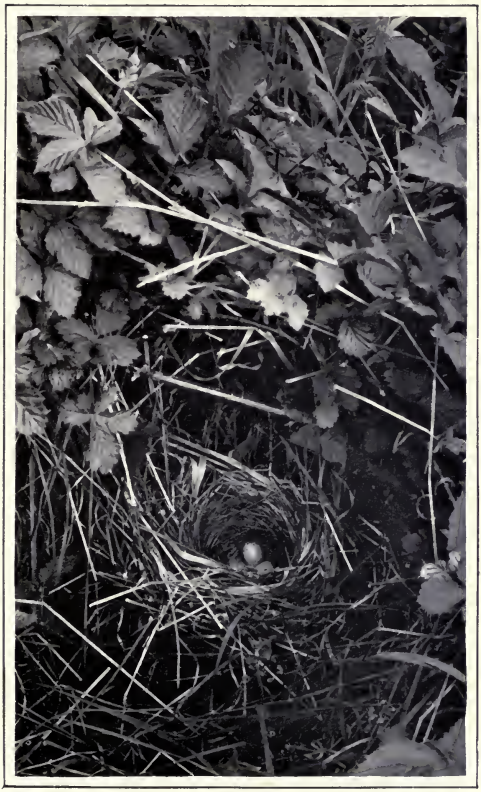
The female lacks the grey on her head, also the rosy tint on her under parts.

This species breeds in suitable localities all over England, Wales, Ireland, and the greater part of Scotland.

It builds its nest in all kinds of low bushes, such as bramble, thorn, briar, and furze, and is so partial to nettles that it is generally known amongst country people as the "Nettle Creeper." The structure, though deep, is of a very flimsy character, and consists of dead grass stems and horsehair, the latter being used as a lining.

The eggs number from four to six, of a dirty greenish-white ground colour, speckled and spotted with brown and grey, generally evenly distributed over the surface of the shell.

The song consists of a few sweet and oft-repeated notes, delivered with great vehemence, not to say passion, the vocalist appearing to labour under considerable excitement whilst hurrying through his brief carol. This species commences to sing very early in the morning, and during May and June often continues



WHITETHROAT'S NEST AND EGGS.

until after it is dark. It also sings on the wing, as well as from the top of a hedge or bramble bush. Last summer I sat down to rest between a number of scattered thorn bushes and a wide old

WHITETHROAT ON NEST

hedgerow on a Surrey hillside. A few moments afterwards a small bird left the hedge and took refuge in one of the bushes about twenty-five yards below me. Its notes and the white line on

either side of the tail told me unmistakably that it was a Whitethroat. Presently the little songster shot up into the air to a height of some twenty or thirty feet, and with outspread tail and head and wings, performing all kinds of strange antics, bubbled out its hurried notes as it descended to the topmost spray of the bush which it had just left. This performance was frequently repeated until his mate left the hedgerow behind me and joined him, when his excitement appeared to abate to some extent.

The call notes of this species are very varied, and have been written down by different observers in a variety of ways. The most general are those sounding like *cha, cha* and *purr, purr.*

THE NIGHTINGALE.

THE Nightingale measures a little over six inches in length, and is of a uniform tawny-brown on its upper parts, except in the case of the tail coverts and quills, which are of a rusty-red tinge, conspicuously seen when the bird is flying away from the observer. Chin, throat, and all under parts greyish-white tinged with brown on the breast and reddish on the under tail coverts.

This thrice-welcome migrant arrives upon our shores in April, and leaves again in August. It is peculiarly limited in its breeding area, which extends no farther west than the Valley of the Exe and only to York in a northerly direc-

tion. Of course, odd specimens have been heard by trustworthy observers beyond these limits, but they are exceptional, and the species is unknown both in Scotland and Ireland. Attempts have been made from time to time to induce the bird to extend its range, but they have one and all proved futile. The late Sir John Sinclair had numbers of eggs sent from the South of England and placed in Robins' nests in Caithness, but although the closely allied foster-mothers successfully hatched and reared the young Nightingales they went off and never returned. The experiment of turning adult birds down in certain parts of Wales beyond the localities reached by free members of the species also proved a failure. It is said to "be met with only where the cowslip grows kindly," but this extraordinary assertion is difficult to understand, because it is hard to remember where that common and hardy plant does not "grow kindly."

The nest is made of dry grass stalks, dead leaves, moss, bits of bark, and fibrous roots, and is lined with fine grass and horsehair. It is built on or near the ground, on a little bank at the foot of a tree, at the bottom of a hedgerow,

or on the stump of a felled tree ; in woods, plantations, copses, quiet gardens, and on commons where clumps of hazels, brambles, and briars grow.

The eggs number from four to six, of a uniform olive-brown or olive-green colour. Occasionally greenish-blue specimens are found.

It would be difficult to overpraise the almost perfect song of this bird, the king of all British feathered melodists ; for although I greatly admire the vocal powers of the Song Thrush, Skylark, and Blackcap, I do not think that any one of them can come near the Nightingale for perfection of phrasing, rich mellowness, or the loud, clear, silvery sound of its notes. I agree with Mr. Witchell, who has studied the songs of birds more closely, perhaps, than any other living man, when he says :

"This tempestuous song, this wild melody, the triumphal song of Nature herself, pierces beyond the ear right to the heart of the listener."

The Nightingale is the only bird I ever remember to have heard singing in a fog, and this occurred in Surrey a little before midnight during the third week in May.

NIGHTINGALE'S NEST AND EGGS.

The male members of this species arrive upon our shores from ten days to a fortnight earlier than the females, and sing by night in order to attract the latter, which travel during the hours of darkness. As soon as the young ones are hatched the superb song ceases, and both parent birds confine their energies to the wants of the chicks.

Poets of all ages have given the song of the Nightingale a great deal of attention, but how strangely they have gone astray in regard to the bird's habits! It appears to have appealed to most of them on account of its practice of singing by night, and the touch of melancholy in the three or four lengthened notes that commence softly and gradually rise until they are so loud and strong that they may be heard at a great distance. Curiously enough, they made the mistake of thinking that their Philomel only sang by night, and was the solitary bird that did so.

Even our immortal William of Avon says:

"The Nightingale, if he should sing by day
When every goose is cackling would be thought
No better a musician than the Wren."

The fact that the bird sings by day as

well as by night was known, however, to the ancients, because Virgil mentions it. Readers of this little volume will also gather that other feathered musicians, such as the Sedge and Grasshopper Warblers, Woodlark, and Cuckoo, also sing by night.

Individual members of this species differ in the quality of their notes, as was observed as far back as Pliny's time.

The alarm note sounds like *wate, wate, cur, cur,* or *witt, krr.*

THE LESSER WHITETHROAT.

The Lesser Whitethroat arrives in April and leaves again in September. It is far less numerous than its larger relative, and is not so widely distributed over the British Islands. This bird is most plentiful in the South and East of England, becoming scarcer towards the North and West, rare in Scotland, and absent altogether from Ireland as a breeding species.

It measures just over five inches in length, and has the upper parts greyish-brown, wings and tail dusky, the feathers being edged with greyish-brown instead of chestnut, which distinguishes it from the Greater Whitethroat. The under parts are greyish-white.

This species loves high, thick hedges rather than large woods, and builds its nest, which is a slight and flimsy structure made of dead grass, stalks, and lined with horsehair, in hedges, briar, bramble, gorse, and other bushes.

The eggs, four or five in number, are

LESSER WHITETHROAT'S NEST AND EGGS.

white or light creamy white, with the faintest suggestion of green in ground colour, spotted and speckled with ash-grey and greenish-brown.

LESSER WHITETHROAT FEEDING YOUNG.

THE LESSER WHITETHROAT.

The Lesser Whitethroat is inferior to the Greater as a musician, but makes up for its deficiency in quality by its liberality in regard to quantity, for it sings almost incessantly, especially during sultry weather, and keeps on until very late in the summer. Its notes are without variation, hurriedly delivered, and sound like *sip, sip, sip.*

The bird's call notes have been likened to the words *check, check.*

THE SISKIN.

THIS favourite cage pet measures a little over four and a half inches in length, has the top of the head black and the upper parts of the body greenish-olive, streaked with black, except the greater wing coverts and quills, which are brownish-black, tipped and bordered with yellow; rump yellow, upper tail coverts greenish-olive. The tail is slightly forked and dusky black, yellowish on the upper half, except in the case of the two centre feathers. A yellow streak runs over and behind the eye. Chin black, throat and breast yellowish-green, under parts greyish-white streaked with dusky black.

The female is a trifle smaller, and lacks the black on her crown and chin.

Although the nest of this species, which used to be called the Aberdevine amongst bird-catchers, has been found occasionally in various parts of England, it is chiefly known as a winter visitor, and may be seen, along with flocks of Redpolls, feeding upon the seeds of the alder, birch, and larch, from September until April. It breeds regularly, however, in the great pine forests of Scotland and in certain parts of Ireland.

The nest is generally placed on the branch of a fir at a considerable height from the ground, although specimens have been found even in furze and juniper bushes. It is composed of slender twigs, dried grass, moss, wool, and horsehair, lined with vegetable down, rabbit's fur, and a few soft feathers.

From four to six eggs are laid, of a greyish-white ground colour, tinted with green or pale bluish-green, spotted and speckled with pale and dark reddish-brown, sometimes streaked with the latter colour.

The song of the Siskin has been likened to the running-down of a piece of clockwork, and it used to be a great favourite amongst stocking weavers in Germany as a cage pet, on account of the fact that

SISKIN'S NEST AND EGGS.

the tones of its song mingled so as to resemble the noise made by stocking looms.

One day I watched and listened to a cock in a Highland forest for some time. He sat for a little while on the topmost spray of a tall fir tree uttering his somewhat low but sweet and varied notes, then took an excursion into the air as if he intended to fly away, but changed his mind and his course several times, and on each occasion repeated his melody, and finally came back and alighted on the same twig from which he started.

The call notes are shrill and oft-repeated during flight, sounding something like *tit, tit, tit,* or *tut, tut, tut.*

THE SEDGE WARBLER.

THE Sedge Warbler, or Sedge bird, as this restless, noisy little creature is frequently called, is by far the most numerous member of its family visiting the British Islands during the summer. It arrives in April, and takes its departure again for its winter quarters, which extend as far as South Africa, in September, although odd specimens are said to have been seen even in winter.

It is about four inches and three-quarters in length, greyish-brown on its upper parts, streaked with dusky brown; its chin and throat are white, and under parts pale buff. Over the eye is a conspicuous yellowish white streak, which,

SEDGE WARBLER'S NEST
WITH CUCKOO'S EGG IN IT.

SEDGE WARBLER
ON NEST.

together with the dark stripes on its back, readily distinguish it from its relative, the Reed Warbler.

This species breeds in suitable localities nearly all over the British Islands, with exception of the Shetlands. I have met with it in tiny clumps of willows growing by small stream-sides high up amongst the Westmorland Fells.

Its home is amongst reeds, rushes, osiers, brambles, and all kinds of bushes near to lakes, swamps, rivers, ponds, and ditches, although it may occasionally be met with breeding at a considerable distance from water.

The Sedge Warbler builds its nest in rushes, brambles, bushes, and almost any kind of thick, tangled herbage. It is generally lower down than that of the Reed Warbler, sometimes quite upon the ground. I have found it on several occasions upon young pollards a yard from the ground, and once in a hedgerow at an elevation of five or six feet. The structure is loosely built and composed of grass and moss outside, lined with willow down and horsehair. It is frequently adorned with a large white feather protruding over the outside edge or bending inwards in such a

way as to hide the eggs. These number five or six, of a pale yellowish-brown clay colour, clouded and mottled with darker brown, and often streaked at the larger end with hair-like black lines.

This bird is a persistent singer, with a harsh voice, an inordinate fancy for repetition, and a great faculty for mimicking the cries of other birds. It is willing to oblige anyone who will listen to its chattering, half-scolding, and always hurried song, night or day. A handful of gravel or mould thrown into any reeds or bushes wherein a male Sedge Warbler is roosting will nearly always induce the bird to pour forth a stream of melody.

I have frequently heard members of this species singing nearly all night long on the Norfolk Broads, and many times when taking my photographic plates out of wash at two o'clock in the morning I have started a chorus around me by emptying the buckets of water with a splash over the stern of the little house-boat in which I was staying.

The male has another peculiarity which is not often mentioned in books. In the early part of the season he is fond of taking little fluttering excursions in the

air a few yards above the reeds whilst he bubbles forth his merry, hurried song. This is, no doubt, to attract the females during the pairing season.

I have heard members of this species imitate the notes of the Landrail, Common Sparrow, Nightingale, Whitethroat, Chaffinch, Robin, Swallow, and Blackbird. In the case of the last three species an individual mimicked all their notes within half a minute, not pausing as the Marsh Warbler does, but running straight on in a breathless hurry, and then turning back to repeat the whole over again.

The alarm cry of the Sedge Warbler when disturbed is a harsh *churr*. It also has another, sounding something like *tut-tut*. The bird makes use of a soft call resembling *wheet-wheet*.

THE LESSER REDPOLE.

THIS is the smallest of our Finches, measuring only about four and a half inches in length. Its crown is crimson-red, hind part of head and rest of upper parts dark brown, the feathers being edged with reddish - brown. Upper tail - coverts tinged with crimson. Wings and tail dusky, edged with pale reddish-brown, the latter forked. Chin black, throat and breast rose-pink to vermilion, rest of under parts light greyish, streaked on the sides with dull brown. The female is rather smaller, and lacks the red on her breast and upper tail-coverts.

The Lesser Redpole has bred, somewhat erratically it is true, in nearly every

county in England, but is most numerous in the northern counties and in Scotland. It also nests in Ireland, where it is scarcer in the south than the north. Its nest is a very pretty little structure made of a few slender, dead twigs (used as a foundation), dead grass stalks, moss, and rootlets beautifully lined with willow down and occasionally hair and feathers. It is built in willows, alders, firs, hawthorn, birch, hazel, and other trees and bushes. It has also been found in heather.

The eggs, which number from four to six, are of a very pale bluish-green ground colour, spotted generally about the larger end with orange-red, and sometimes streaked with a darker tint.

The song of this species is not of a high order in regard to quality, and has been variously described by different authorities. Professor Newton says, "Towards the end of winter the cocks break out in song, which, though not powerful, is lively and agreeable, and begin to indulge in the characteristic exultant flight during which it is generally uttered." Mr. Henry Seebohm describes it as "a short, monotonous trill, clear and not unmusical"; whilst Bech-

stein's judgment is that "Its feeble warblings are only a low, continued twittering."

In spite, however, of its shortcomings as a vocalist, it is a favourite cage pet,

LESSER REDPOLE'S NEST AND EGGS.

especially with children, because of its boldness, docility, and intelligence.

It is called the Lesser Redpole, because it is rather smaller than its near

relative, the Mealy Redpole, which breeds on the Continent and sometimes visits this country in winter. The breeding area of the Lesser Redpole seems to be almost restricted to the British Islands. This species flocks during the autumn, and although many remain with us throughout the winter, numbers migrate to the Continent.

The call notes are *pe-weet* and *kreek, kreek, hayid.*

THE REED WARBLER.

This species arrives upon our shores during the latter part of April, and leaves again for its winter quarters in Africa during September, although a specimen is said to have been shot in Ireland, where the bird does not breed, as late even as December.

The Reed Warbler is about five and a half inches in length, is brown on its upper parts, tinged with chestnut, which becomes more pronounced on the rump and white on the under parts, tinged with reddish buff, especially on the breast and sides. Its legs and toes are slaty-brown.

It breeds in reed and osier beds and other places where there is plenty of cover to suit its skulking habits, on the

banks of lakes, ponds, and sluggish streams, and is much commoner on the east and southern sides of England than the west and north. I have met with it commonly in certain parts of Gloucestershire, and it is said to be fairly numer-

REED WARBLER'S NEST AND EGGS.

ous in Wales. It does not, however, breed in Scotland or Ireland.

The nest is a very beautiful structure, formed of long blades of dead grass, seed, branches of reeds, and bits of wool lined inside with fine dead grass and hair. It is cleverly suspended between two, three, four, or even as many as five reed

MALE AND FEMALE REED
WARBLERS AT HOME.

stems at varying heights above the water. I have, however, on several occasions seen it in willow and alder bushes at some

YOUNG REED WARBLER.

distance from that element, and it has even been found in a lilac bush in such a very unlikely neighbourhood as Hampstead.

The structure is very deep for the size of the builder, but this peculiarity of its architecture serves a very useful purpose, for when the reeds to which it is attached are violently swayed to and fro by strong gusts of wind, it prevents the eggs from rolling out and away to certain destruction.

The eggs, numbering from four to six, are of a dull greenish-white or greyish-

green ground colour, spotted and blotched with darker greyish-green and light brown.

The male helps the female not only in the work of feeding the chicks, but in brooding, and it is a very pretty sight to see them exchanging places on the nest.

The song of this species somewhat resembles that of the Sedge Warbler in being full of chatter, but is not so loud or harsh, and is delivered, as a rule, whilst the singer is hiding amongst reeds. It imitates the note of the Starling, Wagtail, Swallow, and other birds, but is vastly inferior to the Marsh Warbler both as a musician and a mimic. I have heard it at its best during a calm summer evening on the Norfolk Broads, where it sings far into the night and early in the morning, excepting during windy weather, which seems to be greatly disliked by all feathered inhabitants of reed beds. The following extracts from one of my old diaries kept during a stay on Hickling Broad illustrate rather graphically the influence of wind upon the vocal activities of birds :

May 27.—"Windy, dark night; not a bird of any kind to be heard."

May 28.—" Fine calm night. Reed, Sedge, and Grasshopper Warblers, Snipe, Water Rail, Coot, Moorhen, Peewit, and other birds all singing and calling until one o'clock in the morning."

The song of the Reed Warbler has been represented as *tiri, tier zach zerr, scherk heid tret* by one authority, and as *tiri yach yerr sherk heid tret* by another. Each note is repeated by the singer a number of times. Its call note is a harsh *turr* or *choh, choh.*

THE ROCK PIPIT.

THE Rock Pipit, although subject to some seasonal movement, is a resident in the British Islands, and I have never yet heard its song or seen its nest away from the sound of the restless sea. In fact, it is the only song bird the ocean can boast, for although such species as Skylarks, Twites, Starlings, and Linnets frequently breed close by the sea, their haunts are by no means confined to its shores as is the case with the bird under notice.

The Rock Pipit is the largest of the three members of its family breeding in this country. It is olive-brown above,

marked with dark streaks in the centres of the feathers; has a dull white throat and under parts, the latter streaked and clouded with dark brown. The bird harmonises well with the dull brown rocks upon which it so often sits, and I have often experienced considerable difficulty in detecting it when it kept quite still whilst uttering its call notes.

This species may always be distinguished with absolute certainty from the Tree and Meadow Pipits when it is on the wing by reason of the fact that it shows no white on either side of its tail.

The Rock Pipit breeds nearly all round our coasts excepting between the Humber and the Thames, and loves small islands, such as those behind which the sun is setting in the tailpiece to this article.

Its song is very similar to that of the Meadow Pipit, and consists of a few short simple tinkling notes delivered with great cheerfulness, both upon the wing and whilst the bird is seated on some favourite rock. The call notes are also much like those of the Meadow Pipit.

Its nest is situated under old matted tufts of grass, overhanging pieces of rock, and in crevices, and is made of small pieces of dry seaweed, dead grass of

ROCK PIPIT'S NEST AND EGGS.

various kinds, and a few horsehairs. Seaweed is not always present in the structure, and horsehair frequently absent when the bird is breeding on small islands where it is not procurable.

The eggs number from four to five, and have a grey ground colour slightly tinged with green or reddish-brown, closely spotted with dull greyish- and reddish-brown. They are occasionally marked on the larger end with one or two dark brown lines, and are larger than those of the other two members of the family breeding in our islands

THE GARDEN WARBLER.

This species is about six inches in length, and on its upper parts of a light brown colour tinged with olive. Its under parts are brownish-white, darkest on the throat, chest, and sides. The absence of black or rusty brown on the top of the head always readily distinguishes it from the male or female Blackcap, and the colour of its throat and breast from either of the Whitethroats breeding in this country.

The Garden Warbler arrives in Britain about the end of April or commencement of May, and takes its departure for Africa in September and October.

It breeds sparingly in nearly all suitable parts of England except Cornwall, in Wales, in the South of Scotland, and occasionally in Ireland.

It generally builds its nest at some little height from the ground in thorn, briar, bramble, gooseberry, and other bushes growing in woods, clumps of trees in the proximity of streams, orchards, shrubberies, gardens, and hedgerows. Sometimes the structure, which is made of straws, blades of dead grass, and rootlets, lined with horsehair, is hung amongst nettles like that of a Whitethroat, or placed low down in long grass, mixed with taller wild plants.

The eggs, numbering four or five, rarely six, vary in ground colour from white to greenish-white or yellowish-stone-grey, are spotted, blotched, and clouded with underlying markings of ash-grey and buffish-brown. Some specimens are marbled with brown, and it is often a difficult matter to distinguish others from those laid by the Blackcap.

By most people the Garden Warbler is considered to rank next to the Blackcap as a melodist, and the songs of the two species resemble each other so much that I have known a naturalist with a good ear and wide experience unable to say definitely which bird was singing until he got a sight of the vocalist. Mr. Hudson says that "the Garden

GARDEN WARBLER ON NEST.

Warbler's song is like a good imitation of the Blackcap's, but it is not so powerful and brilliant. Some of its notes possess

GARDEN WARBLER'S NEST AND EGGS

the same bright, pure, musical quality, but they are hurriedly delivered, shorter, more broken up, as it were. On the other hand, to compensate for this inferior character there is more of it; the bird, sitting concealed among the clustering leaves, will sing by the hour, his rapid, warbled strain sometimes lasting for several minutes without a break."

The song is certainly softer, and lacks something of the wild dash and irregularity of that of its relative, but some of its notes are quite as sweet, and this fact strikes the listener, particularly when the bird is heard close at hand in some quiet, out-of-the-way corner where other vocalists do not interfere with the full enjoyment of the Garden Warbler's song.

The alarm note is a harsh "*tech*," sounding something like the noise made by two pebbles being struck together.

THE MARSH WARBLER.

On account of its great similarity of size, general appearance, and habitat, this rare British breeding species was long confounded by naturalists with the Reed Warbler.

The bird is greenish-olive on its upper parts, and lacks the rusty-red rump and sides of the commoner species. Its under parts are white, slightly tinged with yellowish-buff on the sides where the Reed Warbler is reddish buff. Its legs are pale flesh-brown in colour, whereas those of its relative are dark slaty-brown.

This species does not build its nest over water, whereas the one with which it has been confounded nearly always does so. The structure is composed of grass stems, and occasionally bits of

moss intermixed on the outside with an inner lining of fine dead grass, and nearly always contains one or two black horse-hairs. It is not so neatly finished as that of the Reed Warbler, and is generally suspended amongst nettles, Meadow Sweet, and Mugwood, the last plant appearing, where I have studied the species, to be first favourite.

The eggs, numbering from four to seven, are easily distinguished from those of the Reed Warbler by their lighter ground colour, which is greenish-white to greenish-blue clouded with underlying markings of grey and spotted with olive-brown.

It is as a singer of great sweetness and power, however, that the bird chiefly concerns us in this little work.

Last summer I spent several days in the West of England studying the species, and whilst I was lying hidden with my camera within three feet of a nest, had many opportunities of hearing the exquisite song of the male to perfection. Whilst the hen was sitting on the nest he frequently took up his station on a bramble spray just above and partly behind her, and regaled us both with the

MARSH WARBLER ON THE NEST.

most wonderful programme of feathered music I have ever heard. As a mimic, the Marsh Warbler is unsurpassable.

Several times the specimen I listened to began his concert with the alarm cry of a Song Thrush, so loud and accurately rendered that I was completely deceived into thinking that I was listening to the notes of a disturbed member of that species. After a little pause he would reproduce the warbling notes of a Swallow, then the *tut, tut, tut* of a Blackbird, followed by the full, rich notes of the Nightingale. He could also reproduce the call note of a Common Partridge, and the sweet little song of a Linnet with equal fidelity. He always appeared to take great care not to mix his music, for, after finishing one piece, there was a noticeable pause before the commencement of another.

In the case of another pair of birds, that had been robbed, I noticed that the male sang much upon the wing as he flew back and forth from tree to tree across an osier-grown clay pit.

This species was first discovered in Somersetshire, and has been found breeding in Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire, and Cambridge.

It is a great pity that it should be so much persecuted by egg collectors, some of whom seem bent upon ruining its chances of ever becoming a regular British breeding species. To listen to the bird's exquisite song for ten minutes is a far greater pleasure than to gaze for a month at its empty egg shells in a cabinet.

THE REED BUNTING.

THE male Reed Bunting, or Reed Sparrow as it is frequently called, can hardly be mistaken for any other British bird on account of his conspicuous velvety black head and white collar running from the base of the bill down the sides of the neck some distance, and thence right round to the back of the head. His back is brownish-black, the feathers being broadly margined with reddish-brown and tawny grey; breast and under parts white, tinged and streaked with brown towards the sides. He is rather longer than the Common Sparrow, and shows a distinct white streak down either side of his tail when flying away from the observer.

His mate is smaller and has a brown instead of a black head.

Although certainly a singer, the Reed Bunting is not a great feathered musician, its song consisting of a few simple notes which the bird delivers with considerable persistency from the top of a reed or alder bush. It sounds like *te, te, tu, te,* diversified by an occasional discordant *raytsh*. Bechstein, the great German authority on cage birds, says that it is such an admirer of music that it will approach an instrument without fear, and testify to its joy by extending its wings and tail like a fan and shaking them.

The alarm cry is a sharp twitter, and when the male is afraid to approach the nest (either to take his turn in the labours of brooding or with food for the young) on account of some real or fancied danger, he persistently reiterates three melancholy notes that sound like "*Don't hit me.*"

This species breeds fairly commonly near sluggish streams, ponds, swamps, and large sheets of water with reed-clad shores.

Its nest is generally situated amongst long grass, rushes, nettles, and sedges, although I have found it in the heather in the Outer Hebrides, and in a small

FEMALE REED BUNTING AND YOUNG.

thorn bush quite two hundred yards away from water in Surrey. The materials used in the structure are dried grass and moss with an inner lining of fine dead grass, hairs, and the feathery tops of reeds.

The eggs number four to six or even seven, and are of a purplish-grey or pale olive ground colour, spotted and streaked with rich, dark purple-brown.

This bird resides with us all the year round, and its numbers are increased during the winter by other members of its species arriving from the Continent.

THE GOLDFINCH.

This exceedingly pretty bird measures about five inches in length. The top of its head, nape, and the feathers from the base of the bill to the eye are black; forehead and throat rich scarlet; cheeks and under parts white, tinged on the breast and sides with pale, tawny-brown. Back pale tawny-brown, wing-coverts and quills black, the latter barred across with yellow and tipped with white. Tail quills black marked with white, and buffy-white near their tips.

Seventy years ago this species was extremely abundant, and as recently as 1873 a boy caught close upon five hundred during a single morning near to Brighton; but it is now, alas!

comparatively rare, on account of the reclamation of waste lands having destroyed its seed-food plants, such as the thistle and burdock, and the heavy demands made upon its numbers for cage pets. Of course, a check has now been put upon the latter source of drainage to a great extent by the Wild Birds' Protection Acts, and the birds are obtained from Germany.

During recent years I have met with it breeding in Surrey, Sussex, Suffolk, Norfolk, Devonshire, and Westmorland. I know a place in the second-named county where as many as ten pairs bred in one season, and within the last half-dozen years I have twice seen small flocks in the autumn near London, which, let us hope, is an encouraging sign.

It is now rare in Scotland, but has been described as still common in the poorer and wilder parts of Ireland.

The Goldfinch is a migratory bird, although a few individuals winter with us, and are known in the spring from members of the species that have spent the cold season farther south by their less brilliant colours.

The nest is placed in the fork of an apple, pear, or other fruit tree in orchards

NEST AND EGGS OF GOLDFINCH.

and gardens; sometimes in evergreens or on the bough of a sycamore or chestnut tree, and occasionally in a thick hedgerow. It is composed of rootlets, moss, dry grass, wool, spiders' webs, and lichens on the outside, and has an inner lining of vegetable down, hairs, and soft feathers. It is a neat and beautiful structure.

The eggs number from four to six, and are greyish- or greenish-white, spotted and streaked with light purplish- and reddish-brown and grey.

Although some people do not rank the Goldfinch very highly as a feathered vocalist, its twittering song is full of melody and sweetness, and together with its striking beauty and lively manners endear it to the heart of every lover of the country and its sights and sounds.

Bechstein says, "Its agreeable song, which is only discontinued during moulting, is a mixture of tones and harmonies more or less dwelt upon."

It sings both when perched and upon the wing. Instances are upon record of young Goldfinches taken from the nest when only two or three days old, reproducing when they grew up not the music of their own kind, but the songs

of other species heard from their places of captivity.

The poets have not given the bird a great deal of attention, but our photograph of a nest and eggs proves that Grahame was a good observer, else he could not have penned the following lines :

"Sometimes suspended at the limber end
Of planetree spray, among the broad-leav'd shoots
The tiny hammock swings to every gale."

The call notes have been written down as *ziflit* or *tisfiit*, *twee-eet* or *twit*, oft repeated, and *glit* uttered quickly.

THE BLACKCAP WARBLER.

ALTHOUGH generally distributed in suitable parts of England and Wales, and found breeding sparingly in the Lowlands of Scotland and certain parts of Ireland, the Blackcap Warbler is not so common in my experience as the youthful student would be led to believe after reading several books I could name upon ornithology.

It arrives in this country about the middle of April, as a rule ; but, like many other migrants, is liable to some variation of date, being more influenced by the conditions of the weather than the readings of the calendar. It takes its departure again in September, although specimens have been observed during every month of the winter in the South and West of England.

The Blackcap is about five and a half inches in length, has a jet-black crown and light olive-brown upper parts, becoming greyer on the rump; throat and breast ash-grey, and under parts white. The female is somewhat similar in appearance, except for the fact that the top of her head is chocolate-brown instead of black.

BLACKCAP WARBLER'S NEST AND EGGS.

This species loves small woods and spinnies with abundant undergrowth, shrubberies, old orchards, gardens, and bits of waste land with plenty of brambles and nettles growing thereon. If there is a sluggish stream close by, so much the better; although I have several times found it breeding far away from water of any kind.

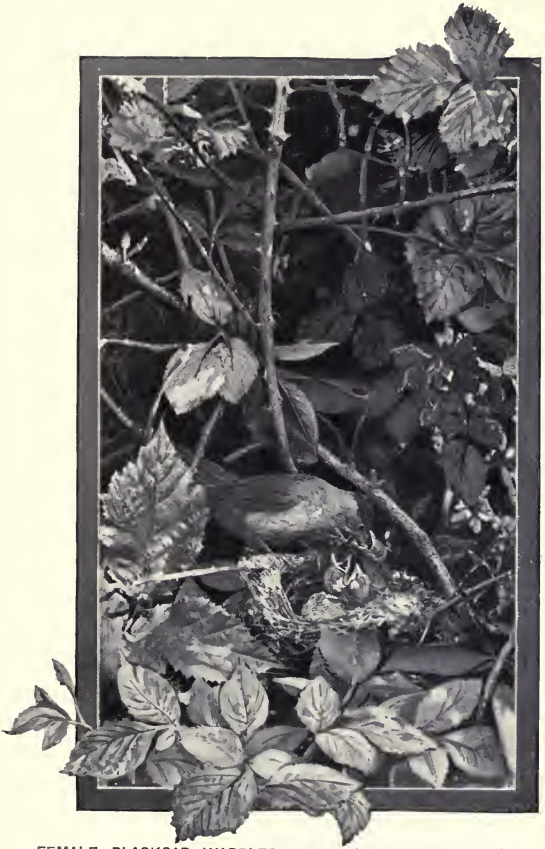
The nest is a flimsy structure placed at varying heights from two to ten or twelve feet above the ground in brambles, nettles, briar, and thorn bushes, privet and other hedges. It is composed of straws, fibrous roots, and dead grass, frequently intermixed with cobwebs, and lined with hair.

The eggs number five or six, and may be divided into two types of coloration. In one they are of a greyish-white ground colour suffused with buffish-brown and spotted, blotched, and marbled with dark brown, similar to those of the Garden Warbler. In the other they are of a pale brick-red or crimson hue marked with deep reddish-brown.

This bird is one of our finest feathered melodists. Gilbert White was greatly in love with its vocal powers, and in his third letter to Daines Barrington says that the "wild sweetness of its song reminded him of Shakespeare's lines in *As You Like It:*

> "And tune his merry note
> Unto the *wild* bird's throat."

In Letter XL. to Pennant, he says, "The Blackcap has a full, sweet, deep, loud and wild pipe; yet that strain is



FEMALE BLACKCAP WARBLER FEEDING YOUNG.

of short continuance, and his motions are desultory; but when that bird sits calmly and engages in song in earnest, he pours forth very sweet, but inward melody, and expresses great variety of soft and gentle modulations, superior perhaps to those of any of our warblers, the Nightingale excepted."

Everyone who has heard and seen the Blackcap will at once recognise the truth and accuracy of this; but, strangely enough, Gilbert White never once mentions the Garden Warbler in his writings.

The estimate of a wild bird's song is like that of the voice of a public singer —to some extent a matter of individual opinion. Personally, though by no means disposed to underrate the beauty and power of the Blackcap's song, I do not think that it approaches so near in quality to that of the Nightingale, or is so far superior to that of the Garden Warbler as some observers appear to believe.

The Blackcap is a very shy, retiring bird, preferring to be heard rather than seen. The male takes his share of the duties of incubation, and it is said that he beguiles the tedium of his task by singing whilst sitting on the nest. I have

watched him brooding on several occasions, but in spite of long vigils have never had the gratification of hearing a single note.

Curiously enough, the poets have given this superb singer very little attention, probably because they were seldom in a position to identify the vocalist, however much they admired his music.

The alarm note of this species sounds something like *tack-tack* or *teck-teck*.

THE BULLFINCH.

THERE is no need for me to describe the appearance of the male bird of this species, which has been rendered familiar to nearly everybody in town and country alike on account of the facts that its engaging manners and striking colours have made it a favourite cage pet. It may be necessary, however, to mention that the female differs from her mate in the following particulars. The black on the top of her head is not so intense, her back is greyish-brown, and her breast and under parts are of a dirty brown colour instead of bright tile red.

Both male and female may always be instantly identified when on the wing by the conspicuous patch of white on

the rump, and when not seen the presence of the species is easily known by its unmistakable plaintive call note, which is constantly uttered whilst the birds are hunting in pairs or families for food along a hedgerow or from bush to bush

NEST AND EGGS OF BULLFINCH

in a wood. It sounds something like *wheon*.

This species has profited more by the

Wild Birds' Protection Acts than perhaps any other breeding in our country. It is as much hated by some people on account of the harm it does to the buds of fruit trees, as it is loved by others as a cage pet. It has increased greatly in numbers nearly all over the country during the past ten years, as may be judged when it is mentioned that over forty were shot in one Essex garden last spring. Let us hope that the damage done to buds and branches by small shot expended during the slaughter may not be put down to the credit of the unfortunate feathered victims.

In a secluded Surrey wood, where I spend a good deal of time every July and August studying and photographing birds from the interior of a small green tent pitched near to a place where birds come all day long to drink and bathe, I notice that the Bullfinch is my most frequent visitor. Sometimes an old male will come along in silence, take a few hurried sips, and then abruptly depart, indicating that he has a sitting mate, and at others whole families arrive to quench their thirst, which appears to be abnormal in this species, and to enjoy a good bath.

FEMALE BULLFINCH ON THE NEST.

The Bullfinch breeds in suitable localities throughout the British Isles, but, according to my experience, is commonest in the South of England. Its nest is of rather singular construction, consisting of a little platform of slender dead twigs cleverly interlaced with a somewhat shallow recess in the middle, beautifully lined with fine, fibrous roots and sometimes a little hair. The structure is placed from three to six feet from the ground, as a rule, in whitethorn, blackthorn, briar, and other bushes, also in yew and other evergreen trees growing in gardens, shrubberies, woods, and thick hedgerows.

The eggs number from four to six, of a pale, greenish-blue ground colour, spotted, speckled, and sometimes streaked with purplish-brown, most thickly at the larger end.

The female Bullfinch is a confiding creature whilst brooding, as will be gathered by my readers when I state that the one figured in our illustration became so tame through kind and gentle treatment that she would actually allow me to take her in my hand and place her in any attitude I wished upon the nest before taking a photograph of her.

I secured a large series of pictures of this particular bird on and near her nest.

The song of this species is short and very soft. One day a fine male alighted on a bare branch close to my hiding tent and held forth with his head on one side, as if listening to the sound of his own voice, whilst his body seemed to throb with the effort of producing even such feeble notes as he commanded.

Bullfinches learn the song of the Canary when brought up under that bird, instead of the notes of their own species, and can be taught in confinement to whistle all kinds of airs and melodies.

THE WHEATEAR.

THE Wheatear is a thick-set little bird measuring about six inches in length. It arrives in the South of England about the end of February and beginning of March, and leaves our shores again in August and September. It has the top of the head, nape, and back of a bluish-grey colour, tinged with light brown, rump and upper two-thirds of tail pure white. Wings nearly black, with buff margins and tips to some of the feathers, end of tail black; chin and throat dull white; breast pale creamy white, turning to a dull yellowish-white on the under parts. The female is somewhat browner on her upper parts than the male. The Wheatear may always be readily distinguished by the large white

WHEATEAR'S NEST AND EGGS BENEATH A LARGE STONE, WHICH WAS RAISED IN ORDER TO TAKE THE PHOTOGRAPH.

patch at the base of its tail, seen most conspicuously when the bird is flying away from the observer.

MALE WHEATEAR BRINGING FOOD FOR YOUNG.

This species inhabits high moorland districts where rocks and solitude are the most striking features of the landscape, but it is a mistake to say that the cultivation of land banishes it, for I have met with it breeding on ploughed land in the Highlands, Hebrides, and Shetlands quite commonly.

The nest is situated under loose slabs of rock, in holes in rough, dry stone walls, peat stacks, and rocky banks. I have met with it on two or three occasions in the old nesting burrows of rabbits. It is made of dead grass, rootlets, and

moss, with an inner lining of hair, feathers, and rabbits' down.

The eggs generally number five or six, of a pale greenish-blue, occasionally spotted on the larger end with rusty red.

This species practises a short and somewhat pretty, but not very loud, song, which is enhanced in value by the weird solitude of the vocalist's surroundings. It is frequently uttered whilst the bird is on the wing going through aërial antics, often highly suggestive of dementia.

The call note of the species may be imitated by beating two pebbles together, and sounds like *chick, chack, chack.*

YOUNG WHEATEARS WAITING FOR FOOD.

THE STONECHAT.

THIS very conspicuous and familiar little bird measures just over five inches in length. Its head, nape, throat, back, wings, and tail are black, many of the feathers being edged with rusty brown. On the sides of the neck, wings, and at the base of the tail are large patches of white. Breast dark rust colour, under parts much lighter. Its unlikeness to any other British bird, and habit of perching on the topmost sprays of gorse, juniper, and bramble bushes, render it perfectly easy to observe and identify. The female differs somewhat, being dull brown with buff edgings to the feathers on her upper parts, and having the chin buff, sides of the neck brownish-white, and breast and under parts duller.

NEST AND EGGS OF STONECHAT.

This species does not live, as its name might be taken to imply, in stony wildernesses, but upon furze-clad commons and uncultivated land where juniper, brambles, and other kinds of tangled vegetation grow. The nest is built upon or near the ground, and is generally well concealed. It consists of rootlets, moss, and dry grass, with an inner lining of hair, feathers, and occasionally pieces of wool. I have often seen it with very little else than fine blades of dead grass.

The eggs number from four to six, and on rare occasions even seven have been found. They are of a pale bluish-green ground colour, closely spotted round the larger end with reddish-brown. Sometimes the spots are entirely absent.

The Stonechat, although subject to local movement, stays with us all the year round. Its soft, low song, although of no great length or importance, is sweet and pleasing, and sometimes contains imitations of other birds' notes. It is delivered both whilst the singer is at rest and hovering in the air. The male helps the female to feed the young ones, and in the case of the chicks hatched from the eggs figured on the previous page he had the whole of the domestic

work to do because his mate disappeared altogether a few days after the young ones had been hatched.

The call note resembles the sound made by striking two small pebbles together in the hand, hence its name of Stonechat. It has been written down as *u-tic, u-tic.* After the young are hatched it changes somewhat and sounds like *chuck, chuck.*

THE WHINCHAT.

THE Whinchat arrives in this country during April, and takes its departure again in September and October. It is about five inches and a quarter in length, and has the crown of the head and upper parts generally of a dusky-brown colour, the feathers being edged with sandy buff. The wings are marked with a large white spot. Upper half of tail white, lower half dark brown edged with sandy buff. A broad white stripe runs from the base of the bill over the eye. Chin is white, throat and breast are light chestnut, under parts pale buff. In the female the white line over the eye and the spot upon the wing are less conspicuous, and the colour of her under parts is less distinctive.

WHINCHAT'S NEST AND EGGS

This species, although somewhat local, is met with nearly all over the British Isles. It is partial to heaths and commons, pastures, and meadows, where it makes its nest on or near the ground in thick tangled grass, heather, and at the bottom of small gorse bushes. The structure is formed of dead grass and moss with an inner lining of fine, dry grass and sometimes horsehair. The eggs number from four to six, of a greenish-blue ground colour, sometimes spotted on the larger end with reddish-brown.

The song is low, but sweet, and is delivered somewhat hurriedly, both whilst the melodist is perched and upon the wing. The call note sounds like *u-tack*.

THE SONG THRUSH.

"The thrush, a spendthrift of his powers,
Enrapturing heaven and earth."

MONTGOMERY.

THERE is, luckily, no need for me to enter into a minute description of the appearance of this well-known and greatly beloved carol singer, which is called a Song Thrush in the South, a Throstle in the North of England, and a Mavis in Scotland. It breeds commonly throughout the British Islands wherever there is any kind of cover in the shape of trees, shrubs, or bushes to give it shelter. Some people think that the Song Thrush resides with us all the year round, but this is only

partially true. I know many high, bleak parts of the country where it is never seen during the depth of winter, and, as a matter of fact, those that stay with

SONG THRUSH AT NEST.

us in the lower and more sheltered regions are only a fraction of the total number bred in our country.

The nest of the Song Thrush is built in evergreens, hedgerows, bushes, ivy

growing against walls and trees, holes in stone walls, on ledges of rock, on beams in sheds, and occasionally, though not as often as that of the Blackbird, absolutely on the ground. It is quite unlike that of any other British bird in its construction, being made of twigs, coarse dead grass, moss, and clay or mud outside, with an inner lining of clay, mud, or cow-dung studded with bits of rotten wood. In some districts where decayed wood is difficult to procure, it is dispensed with altogether, and during very droughty summers I have found several nests occupied by eggs without a vestige of a hard lining. They were similar to those of the Blackbird, only not so neatly lined with fine dead grass. The mud lining is generally allowed to dry hard before the bird commences to lay.

The eggs, numbering from four to six, are of a beautiful deep greenish-blue colour spotted with black. I have on several occasions met with unmarked specimens.

As a melodist the Throstle ranks very high. Many people consider that it comes next to the Nightingale, for which it is often mistaken, when singing very late in the evening, by people who can

NEST AND EGGS OF SONG THRUSH.

claim no great acquaintance with the superb notes of Sweet Philomel.

Mr. Swaysland, of Brighton, who has had a great deal of experience amongst feathered musicians, says that the song of the Mavis is "clear, yet full of mellowness—now pealing out a phrase of wild bluff heartiness, and anon with long-drawn notes tinged with exquisite pathos —striking a responsive chord in the heart of every hearer."

I have heard its song during every month of the year excepting August, when the bird experiences the depression of its annual moult.

During a fine April morning every wood and spinny in the part of Surrey where I reside rings with the melodious notes of the Throstle, and two or three seasons ago we had a specimen that habitually sang from the top of a cabbage in a field almost surrounded by tall trees. I have heard it sing on the ground between bouts of fighting, on the wing, and from a housetop, where a Starling might have been expected to hold forth. It has been timed, and in one instance at least has been found to sing sixteen hours in a single day, and under favourable circumstances some of

its notes may be heard half a mile away.

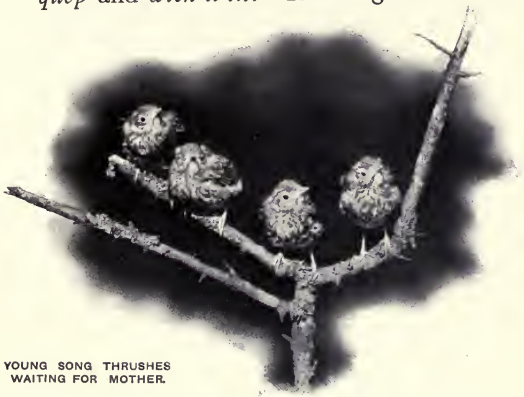
If not the most imitative of all British birds, it comes very close to the holding of that distinction, and can not only mimic some notes as well as their owners can deliver them, but actually improve upon their volume and sweetness. The Ringed Plover and the French Partridge are two examples. I have heard the Throstle reproduce the notes of the following species: Common Curlew, Whimbrel, Dunlin, Peewit, Golden Plover, Common Tern, Redshank, Ringed Plover, French Partridge, and Common Sparrow, besides those of several others.

Thrushes vary not only individually as musicians, but in different parts of the country, I am persuaded. Some of the finest singers I have heard have been in Surrey, Cheshire, and Aberdeenshire.

The poets have given this species a good deal of deserved attention on account of the excellence of its song, and everyone who has had any experience whatever of the country and its wild life in springtime will at once recognise the truth and beauty of the following lines:

"Through the hazels thick espy
The hatching throstle's shining eye."

The call and alarm notes of the Song Thrush are very difficult to convey by the characters of the alphabet. The former sounds something like *sik, sik, sik, sik, siki, tsak, tsak,* and the latter *quep* and *wich-it-tit.* The song has been



YOUNG SONG THRUSHES WAITING FOR MOTHER.

rendered by the words, "Go-it, go-it, stick-to-it, stick-to-it, you'll-do-it, you'll-do-it," but by far the best representation is that of the great Scottish naturalist, Macgillivray, which I have quoted at length in "Our Bird Friends."

Throstles live principally upon worms, grubs, and snails, and they have a habit

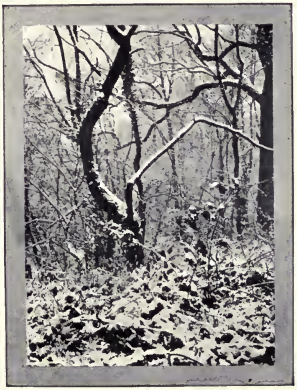
of taking the last-named to some favourite stone, where they hammer the shell until it is sufficiently fractured to enable them to extract the luscious morsel inside. These stones are known as "Thrushes' Anvils." Occasionally when they find a snail with a house upon its back too hard and strong to be broken in this way, they carry it to some height in the air and drop it on a flag or other hard substance. The shell is thus fractured, and the sensible captor descends and devours its prey. The bird also takes its share of fruit, and without any consideration for the good it does during the greater part of the year, is ruthlessly slain by gardeners, who might, in the great majority of instances, use netting instead of shot to the advantage of both fruit trees and birds.

When I hear a garden-loving neighbour's gun going off, I frequently think of the poet's compassionate appeal :

"Scare, if ye will, his timid wing away,
But oh, let not the leaden viewless shower,
Vollied from flashing tube, arrest his flight,
And fill his tuneful, gasping bill with blood."

The members of this species that stay with us throughout the winter months, when not regaling our ears with their

versatile songs, amuse even the most casual observers by their quaint ways of listening for and catching worms on lawn and meadow during open weather. They also well repay feeding with soaked dog-biscuits and other edible trifles during severe weather, when it is almost impossible for them to secure even the shortest supply of natural food. They are able to foretell coming changes in the weather far earlier than human beings, and frequently sing in anticipation of a thaw.



THE YELLOW HAMMER.

WHO does not know this almost universally distributed bird in our country, with its dress of almost canary-like yellow, streaked with brown, and short though oft-repeated song? On furze-clad commons, along cultivated hedgerows, and on railway embankments close to busy London town, and in far-away parts of the country alike, it may be heard morning, noon, and night persistently going over its familiar notes, which always seem to me to accord best with the drowsiness of a hot summer's day. Indeed, I must confess that at such times its reiteration has sent me to sleep.

It has been variously represented by the characters of the alphabet, as the following examples will show: *tic-tic-tic-e-ereze, te, te, te, te, te, te, twyee; chick,*

YELLOW HAMMER
ON NEST.

chick, churr ; chit-chit-chierre-r-r. By far the most popular rendering of it in England, however, is the somewhat hackneyed phrase, "A little bit of bread and no cheese." In Scotland it becomes, "Deil, deil, deil tak ye," a supposed imprecation upon boys who steal its eggs.

There is also a curious legend in the North to the effect that Satan supplies the bird with half a drop of his blood every morning wherewith to mark its eggs with the greatly varied scribbling lines that appear upon them.

The song, although more musical than that of the Corn Bunting, is considered by many people to be a monotonous performance. The poet Grahame was evidently aware of this when he wrote the lines :

"Even in a bird the simplest notes have charms
For me: I even love the yellow hammer's song."

The call note of this species, when disturbed, is a *trit, trit, trit,* and on the wing *tisit.*

It may always be distinguished with certainty from its much rarer relative, the Cirl Bunting, by the fact that it has no black upon its chin.

The female Yellow Hammer is a trifle

smaller than her mate, is much less yellow, and the markings on her head are darker. Both sexes take a share in the work of incubation.

YELLOW HAMMER'S NEST AND EGGS.

The nest is built in hedge banks, at the foot of light open bushes, under brambles, and sometimes even in gorse bushes and thick evergreen hedges at a considerable

height from the ground. It is composed of dry grass, rootlets, and moss on the outside, with an inner lining of fine, dead grass and horsehair.

The eggs, numbering from four to six, are of a dingy white ground colour, tinged with purple, streaked, spotted, and blotched with dark purplish-brown. The streaks or scribblings generally end in a spot, and, on account of their similarity to the marks made by a pen, the bird is known in many parts of the country as the "Writing Lark."

This species, although commencing to breed in April, sometimes has eggs as late even as September.

THE STARLING.

It is quite unnecessary for me to describe the appearance of the Starling, for the species is so common, sociable, and unlike every other feathered friend in this country that confusion is almost impossible.

I love the brave, bustling bird, for when it has any work to do it does not go dawdling along like a lazy boy crawling half-heartedly to school, but rushes about as if the welfare of the whole universe depended upon its individual exertions.

It is a lively singer, with almost unrivalled powers of imitation, and has, I must confess, completely deceived me on several occasions. One fine spring

morning, whilst on my way to a railway station in the north of London, I heard, to my surprise, the familiar notes of a Golden Plover, and immediately began to examine the heavens for a member of that species flying overhead. To my surprise, I discovered that the sounds were coming from a Starling delightedly flapping its wings on a chimney-pot not far away. On another occasion, whilst hunting for a much-desired Sandpiper's nest on the shores of a small loch in the Outer Hebrides, I said to my brother, "Hark! I hear one calling!" But that Sandpiper proved to be a Starling standing on a rock not far off imitating to perfection the soft call notes of the little wader. I have heard different members of this species mimicking the cries and call notes of the Curlew, Whimbrel, Lapwing, Common Partridge, Redshank, Ringed Plover, House Sparrow, and other small birds.

Tame Starlings have been taught to imitate the human voice so well that one has been said to repeat the Lord's Prayer from beginning to end, and Pliny, the historian, mentions one that was able to speak in both Greek and Latin.

The harsh alarm cry of the species

sounds something like the word *spate, spate.*

Although sometimes guilty, especially during very dry seasons, of taking cherries and other fruit, the damage wrought

YOUNG STARLING IN ITS FIRST COAT OF FEATHERS.

in this way is as nothing compared with the vast amount of good done by this species in the destruction of insects injurious to growing crops. It is an amusing sight to watch a flock hurrying and scurrying across a field, the hindmost

members continually flying over the foremost and then running in breathless haste looking eagerly this way and that, probing every likely and unlikely place for some lurking grub, as if life did not contain one moment to be wasted.

They alight on the backs of sheep and cattle in order to destroy troublesome parasites, and at certain seasons of the year may be seen dexterously hawking winged insects over houses and tree-tops.

Starlings have greatly increased in numbers during the last forty years in our islands, and there is no season of the year when flocks, great or small, cannot be seen. Late breeders keep together until far on in May, and the broods of those that commenced housekeeping operations early in April flock together directly they meet each other in the fields. Thus I have known the same nesting hole occupied twice in one season, a fact which has given rise to the belief entertained by some people that the species is double-brooded.

When flocked, these birds have favourite roosting places, to which they resort in tens of thousands every night with the utmost regularity. Sometimes they select a reed bed to sleep in, and do great

damage by too many birds alighting on the same stems and breaking them down. Before finally settling for the night, they perform a great number of wonderful aërial evolutions, especially during fine weather. Whilst sitting in one black mass on every available branch and

ADULT STARLING IN WINTER.

bough, producing an indescribable din by all chissicking and chattering to each other at the same time, they will suddenly become quite silent, and leaping into the air with a noise just like that of a truck-load of small coals being shot into the hold of a steamer, mount to a

considerable height, and commence to wheel and turn as if by some magically communicated command.

At one moment they look like a thick black cloud, and at another like a long trail of grey smoke. Every turn and twist, opening and closing of the whole flock, is performed with a grace and precision of movement which is wonderful to behold.

Starlings nest in holes in trees, rocks, and old ruins; under the roofs of houses, in the thatch of ricks and outbuildings, and sometimes under large stones on steep hillsides. I have also known them breed amongst sticks forming the base of an Osprey's eyrie which was occupied by young ones. A year or two ago I found an open-topped nest containing chicks in an evergreen, where a Blackbird or Thrush might have been expected to breed. Green Woodpeckers are constantly turned out of their laboriously dug holes by members of this species in search of suitable nesting quarters.

The nest is a loosely-put-together structure composed of straws, rootlets, and bits of moss, with a lining of hair, feathers, and occasionally a lock of wool. I have

often found nests, however, with no kind of lining at all except straws.

The eggs number from four to six, of a uniform pale blue colour. This species has a curious habit of dropping its eggs about on lawns and in fields during the early part of the breeding season.

Young Starlings, in their first coats of feathers, are greyish-brown, and lack entirely the beautiful purple and steel-blue sheen which gives their parents such a handsome appearance when the sun is shining upon them.

THE CHAFFINCH.

YOUTHFUL students of ornithology are frequently at a loss to understand why Linnæus, the great Swedish naturalist, gave this bird the somewhat odd scientific name of *cœlebs*, signifying bachelor. He did so because he noticed that in his own country the females left the males behind in winter and migrated south in search of more hospitable climes.

In Scotland and the North of England I have frequently observed the same kind of thing happen, and especially during severe winters, not a female to be seen for weeks together, and the males all congregated in little flocks. In the South and West of England, however, both sexes remain together, as a rule, and,

CHAFFINCH ON THE NEST.

associating with their relatives, the Common Sparrows, hunt farmyards and gardens for corn, seeds, and any other unconsidered trifles they may chance to pick up.

However gloomy the conditions of existence may be, the brave Chaffinch is always sprightly, vigorous, and cheerful, a characteristic which may be plainly seen in our illustration of birds feeding on the snow.

The call note of the species is a loud, ringing *spink, spink,* which is also used as an alarm cry. In the spring the male utters in addition a very sweet one sounding something like *tu-wheet, tu-wheet.* During flight the bird makes use of another note, which is difficult to render by the characters of the alphabet, but may, perhaps, be best represented by the letters *tuke.*

The song is repeated thousands of times per day in the early part of the breeding season. It is a very sprightly performance, like a merry old English catch, *tol-de-rol, lol, chickweedo,* which has been very aptly likened to the words, "Will you, will you kiss me, dear?" Some people consider it a monotonous affair, but in spite of the fact that I have

heard it repeated twenty-one times in four minutes it is always to me, "A full, clear, sprightly ringing ditty." It varies greatly in individuals, and although

CHAFFINCHES, SPARROWS, AND STARLING FEEDING IN WINTER.

London bird-catchers consider an Essex Chaffinch superior to all others as a singer, I prefer to listen to some members of the species I have heard cheering the dark solitude of great Highland pine forests.

German workmen are great Chaffinch fanciers. One has been known to exchange a cow for a clever vocalist of this species, and another to live upon bread-and-water until he had saved the high price of a prime favourite.

It is, I must confess, always a saddening experience for me to hear this little songster's notes ringing clear and sweet from the interior of a wee prison house tied up in a black cloth, and carried along some dismal street beneath the arm of a costermonger. However, it is only fair to add that these men are, as a rule, devoted to their pets, and treat them with the utmost kindness. A great authority upon the subject says that if well treated a Chaffinch will live in confinement for twenty years. It has also been asserted as a curious fact that if an adult male Chaffinch is caught before Whitsuntide he will sing in a cage, but if he should be made a prisoner after this date he will die of grief at being parted from his mate and young ones.

Chaffinches pair towards the end of February and throughout March, although flocks of "bachelors" may occasionally be seen as late as the first week in May, and commence building opera-

tions, as a rule, about the middle of April. They build deep, cup-shaped, and wonderfully neat little nests of moss, wool, lichens, and cobwebs, beautifully

YOUNG CHAFFINCHES.

felted together and securely fixed in the forks of small trees in orchards, hedgerows, and woods. It is generally adorned on the outside with bits of green moss or grey lichens that will render it similar

in appearance to its surroundings, and thus help it to escape detection.

The eggs number from four to six, but clutches of five are the general rule, and are pale greenish-blue in ground colour, clouded with faint reddish-brown and spotted and streaked with dull purplish-brown of various shades.

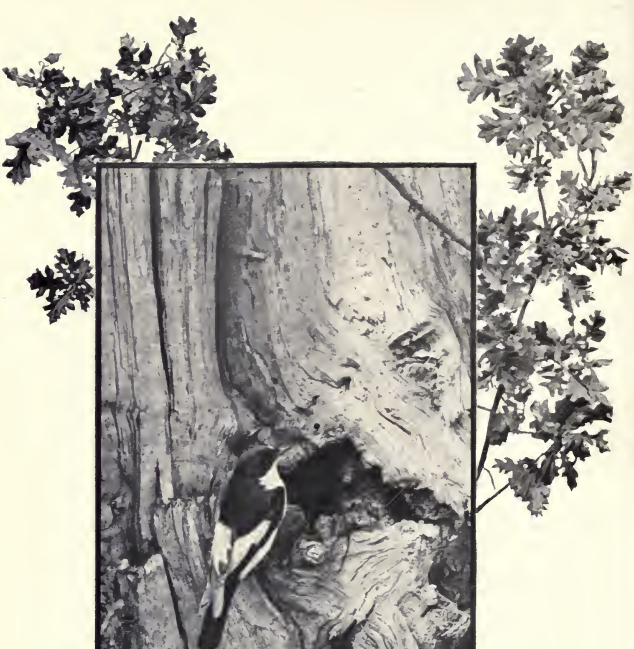
The female Chaffinch lacks the rich colouring of her mate, especially on the head and breast, and is a trifle smaller. The young are fed upon insects by both parent birds, and resemble their mother in appearance whilst wearing the first coat of feathers.

THE PIED FLYCATCHER.

THE Pied Flycatcher is a singularly well-named species, because it answers both adjective and noun exactly.

The male is not quite as large as a Robin, and is, generally speaking, black and white, as shown in our illustration on the next page. In fact, a little girl who saw the picture, exclaimed, "What a pretty wee Magpie!" The small patch of white on the forehead varies in size. In some individuals it is quite conspicuous, and in others scarcely visible. The female lacks it altogether, and is generally less pronounced in her colours than her mate.

This species is partial to certain parts of the country, and although by no means common is to be met with in the six northern counties of England, in Wales,



MALE PIED
FLYCATCHER OUTSIDE
NESTING HOLE.

and in some parts of Scotland. Some authorities say that it is most numerous in the Lake District, but I have met with far more specimens in certain parts of the Principality than anywhere else.

The male has a very pretty, though short and oft-repeated song. It resembles that of the Redstart so closely that it is difficult to say with certainty which bird is producing the music unless the singer be seen. This also applies to its call notes.

A male Pied Flycatcher is a creature of decided character. The one figured in our photograph was busy feeding his mate, sitting on six beautiful pale blue eggs, in a hole in an old tree, which had been struck and partially destroyed by lightning, when a friend of mine and I discovered him. Upon our examining the nesting site the female fluttered out, and joining her mate, they flitted about together from tree to tree until he evidently thought it was time for her to return to her maternal duties. She was, however, afraid to venture back to her nest because my camera stood within a few feet of the entrance hole, and flew nervously from one branch to another in the neighbouring trees. Her

mate, with the evident intention of showing her that there was no cause for alarm, came along and, alighting right in front of my apparatus, took a leisurely peep inside the nesting hole. As this had no visible effect upon her nerves he went off and secured a fat, green caterpillar, which he would not offer her anywhere, although she shivered her little wings in supplication, excepting on the threshold of their breeding quarters.

As even this kind of inducement failed, he indignantly gulped down the food, and with a great show of anger, began to chase her round and round, up and down, until at last he forced her indoors. Later on, this female grew bolder, however, and I succeeded in photographing her on the gnarled trunk of the lightning-blasted tree.

A precisely similar kind of thing happened at another nest, but in this instance the lady was stronger minded, and refused to be bullied into the performance of her duties.

In this particular wood, which was of no great size, four pairs of these interesting birds lived within a few hundred yards of each other. The males appeared to spend the day in catching

winged and other insects for the females, in singing, and chasing each other away from particular spheres of influence.

The Pied Flycatcher, like its commoner relative, the Spotted Flycatcher, is a migratory bird, arriving in this country in April and leaving again in September and October.

It builds its nest generally in holes in trees, but sometimes in old walls. The structure is composed of dry grass, dead leaves, and moss, with an inner lining of hair and feathers.

THE LINNET.

MALE Linnets vary almost as much in the colour of their feathers as they do in the quality of their songs. A fine specimen, arrayed in all the glory of his summer dress, has the forehead and crown glossy blood-red, the rest of the head black, and sides of the neck brownish-grey, back and upper wing coverts deep reddish-brown; wing quills dusky, edged with white; upper tail coverts dark brown; tail quills brownish-black, edged with white, except in the case of the two centre feathers; chin and throat greyish-white, streaked along the middle with greyish-brown; breast glossy rose-red. The last-named colour varies greatly in intensity, and in some birds is almost

absent. In fact, as Yarrell says, perfect specimens are not often met with, and the carmine cap and breast are generally replaced by brownish lake-red.

Some adult male Linnets have lemon-yellow breasts, and in Germany are considered old birds and the best singers.

The female is a trifle smaller than the male and lacks the red on the top of the head and breast.

This species is distinguished from the Lesser Redpole by having no white bar on the wings and no black upon the chin, and from the Twite, with which it is likely to be confused, by the facts that it has a shorter and less deeply forked tail and the male lacking the red on his rump.

LINNET'S NEST AND EGGS

Last spring I spent two days on a Surrey common photographing the

Stonechat figuring in the little picture which decorates the front cover of this book. He was bringing food to his offspring in a nest situated amongst some stunted heather growing in a sheltered dell formed by two gorse-clad ridges about eighty feet in height and a hundred yards apart. Although many Linnets were still roaming the countryside in flocks, numbers were busy love-making and pairing close around me, and I shall never forget the sweetness of the twittering and warbling that went on all day long.

The carols were generally sung from the topmost spray of some furze bush, which was a golden blaze of bloom, but occasionally the vocalist would utter his sweetest notes when dropping gracefully through the air to some intended resting-place.

This bird has received a great deal of attention from the poets, some of whom have described its song as a "careless lay" and others as a

"None-offending song of quiet prettiness."

The call note of the species is a shrill *twit, twit* and *wee, tye wee.*

A Linnet's nest is made of small twigs,

LINNET BRINGING FOOD FOR YOUNG.

fibrous roots, dry grass, stems, moss, and wool, with an inner lining of hair, feathers, rabbit and vegetable down; and is situated in gorse, and broom bushes, white and black thorn bushes, tall heather, and juniper. I have found a nest ten feet from the ground, and two nests quite upon it.

The eggs number four to six, are greyish-white in ground colour, tinged with blue or green and speckled and spotted with purple-red and reddish-brown.

A very strange thing about this species is that it appears to grow shyer during the breeding season, whereas nearly all other birds grow bolder. This peculiar characteristic, of course, increases the difficulty of photographing the creature.

Linnets flock together as soon as the breeding season is over—some of them to migrate, and others to wander about the country visiting stubble fields and waste lands in search of seeds. It is a very pleasant sight to watch a flock resting on the sunlit top of some tall tree on a fine winter's day, and hear the sociable little birds holding a kind of chattering concert.

It is almost needless to add that the Linnet is a great favourite as a cage pet.

Specimens caught in the autumn soon adapt themselves to confinement, but those taken in the spring frequently mope and die. One has been known to live as many as fourteen years in a cage, but I have never yet heard of a specimen in confinement donning the crimson colour on its head or breast.

The species has derived its name in several European countries from its fondness for linseed.

THE SWALLOW.

This deservedly popular harbinger of spring arrives in England about the end of March and beginning of April, and departs again in September, although specimens have been seen during every month of the year, and one hardy individual actually managed to live right through a mild winter in Yorkshire not long ago. There is little need for me to describe the appearance of this familiar bird in detail, but it may be well to say that its forehead, chin, and throat are chestnut brown, upper parts generally and a broad bar across the chest steely blue. Under parts dull, buffy white. The adult Swallow may always be

distinguished, on the wing or at rest, from either the Swift or the Martin, by its much more deeply forked tail.

Its nest is generally built in a chimney or on a rafter in a barn, stable, or shed, although I have seen it plastered against a smooth whitewashed wall, on a dangling tendril of ivy that had grown through the roof of a shed, under a stone bridge, inside an old limekiln, on a ledge under the eaves of a shed, on a picture-frame,

YOUNG SWALLOWS ON TELEGRAPH WIRES.

and inside an old tennis shoe left on a ledge in a boat-house. It is made of pellets of mud generally intermixed with straws and lined with dead grass and feathers. The structure differs in shape according to the site selected for it. Frequently it is formed like half or two-thirds of a saucer when plastered against a wall or rafter, but when on a flat surface the outside consists of a circular wall of mud.

NEWLY-FLEDGED SWALLOW.

The eggs, numbering from four to six, are white, spotted and blotched with dark, reddish-brown, and underlying specks of grey.

This bird's song is one of the most joyous and spontaneous in all the realms of Nature, and the poet might well say :

"Thou hast no sadness in thy song."

It is uttered both whilst the melodist

is flashing at lightning speed through the air and at rest on some house-top or tree, and is an exceedingly sweet and exhilarating warble frequently repeated.

During dull weather, when swallows fly low, they utter a note like *wet wet*, and their alarm cry has been fittingly written down as *feetafeet-feetafetit*. Inside buildings they also use another, which is a clear, ringing *pink pink*.

THE GOLDEN-CRESTED WREN.

THE Golden-crested Wren, or Gold-crest, as it is frequently called, has the distinction of being our smallest British bird, measuring only three and a half inches in length. It is a widely distributed resident, and breeds comparatively close to London and other large towns. On the forehead and round the eyes it is whitish, tinged with olive-green. Crown pale orange in front and bright yellow towards the hind part. The feathers are somewhat lengthened, and form a crest bounded on either side by a streak of black. Upper parts olive-green; wings dusky black with two transverse white bars. Tail quills dusky, edged with yellowish-green. Under parts yellowish-grey, inclining to buff on throat, breast,

and sides. The female is not so brightly coloured as her mate.

The nest is generally, though not always, suspended from the branch of a cedar, spruce, fir, yew, or holly tree at varying heights from the ground. I have seen it in a furze bush, and at an elevation of thirty feet or more from the ground in a fir tree. It breeds in shrubberies, plantations, and spinnies, and makes its nest of green moss, lichens, fine grass, spiders' webs, and hair beautifully felted together and lined with liberal quantities of down and feathers.

The eggs number six or seven, as a rule, and are pale flesh or yellowish-white in ground colour, spotted and blotched with reddish-brown, the markings being most numerous at the larger end.

The Gold-crest's song is like its singer —very small, soft, and sweet. It is difficult to hear, especially towards the end, unless the listener happens to be very close. In the neighbourhood of Birmingham I once had the pleasure of listening to a bird of this species in an evergreen hedge only two or three feet away from me, and was greatly surprised at the sweet melodiousness of its limited notes.

GOLDEN-CRESTED WREN AT NEST.

The sound of its call is something like *tsit, tsit.*

Vast flocks of this wee species occasionally hazard the perils of a journey from the Continent across the North Sea in order to visit our shores, and at such times alight upon the rigging of fishing smacks to rest, and crowd round lighthouses in incredible numbers.

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